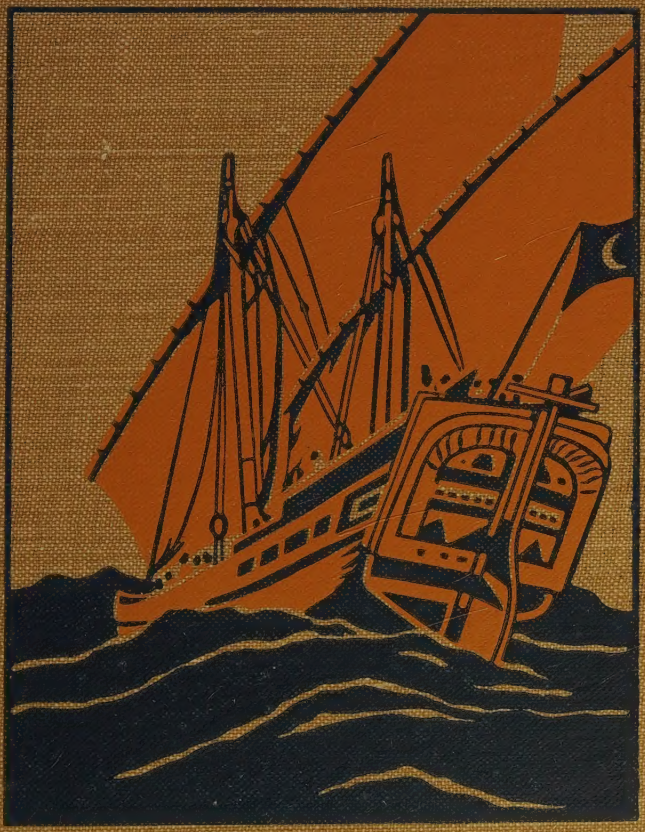
THE GUN-RUNNERS

T. T. JEANS



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THE GUN-RUNNERS

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By
Surgeon Rear-Admiral
T. T. Jeans

The Gun-runners.
John Graham, Sub-Lieutenant, R.N.
A Naval Venture.
Gunboat and Gun-runner.
Ford of H.M.S. " Vigilant ".
On Foreign Service.
Mr. Midshipman Glover, R.N.

D 896

"YOU'LL DO ALL RIGHT, OLD BUCK," O'LEARY SAID

Page 46

Frontispiece

THE GUN-RUNNERS

BY

SURGEON REAR-ADMIRAL

T. T. JEANS, C.M.G.

Author of "Reminiscences of a Naval Surgeon"
"A Naval Venture" "On Foreign Service"
"Mr. Midshipman Glover, R.N." &c. &c.

Illustrated by John Cameron

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To my Wife

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Preface

This book is intended to give a general description of various phases of the Persian Gulf gun-running blockade during the winter season of 1910–11.

In writing it I have obtained much assistance from the Hon. Arnold Keppel's book, *Gun-running and the North-West Frontier.*

The characters are fictitious, but all the incidents described are based on actual occurrences.

T. T. JEANS,
SURGEON REAR-ADMIRAL (retired).

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MAP SHOWING THE SCENE OF OPERATIONS

THE GUN-RUNNERS

INTRODUCTORY

The tribesmen of the North-West Frontier of India —the fierce warlike Mohmands and Afridis of the North, and the more crafty Waziris and Mahsuds of the South—look down from their rugged, inhospitable mountains on the rich alluvial plains of the River Indus, plains teeming with vast numbers of fat cattle and clothed with luxuriant crops.

They long to pour down through their mountain passes to pillage the riches spread so temptingly at their feet; to return laden with rich booty as their forefathers used to do in the days before the British stood in between. That they can no longer do this is the real reason of their hatred of the British.

Time after time they have tried to drive the British back; but their own native-made weapons had no chance against the Martini-Henry. The Lee-Enfield magazine rifle had made their helplessness all the more evident, and they knew that unless they could arm

themselves with modern rifles they could not hope for any success.

About the year 1900, modern rifles commenced to filter through to them in growing numbers. These rifles came from the warehouses of Muscat, in Southern Arabia, nearly a thousand miles away. How they reached Muscat and why this scandalous trade was permitted to exist reflects the utmost discredit on international morality, but is outside the scope of this story. It did exist, and for the next nine or ten years increased enormously. In one season alone it is said that as many as 30,000 rifles passed through the Kandahar bazaar—all of them destined to arm these tribesmen.

From Muscat, Arab dhows took them across to the southern coast of Persia; Ghilzai camel caravans carried them through Baluchistan to Kandahar, and from there distributed them throughout the frontier tribes.

The British and Indian Governments at last woke to the dangers ahead, but owing to existing treaties—especially with France—could do little but enforce a more vigorous patrol of the Persian Gulf.

In the years 1909 and 1910, the little Persian Gulf Naval Squadron had captured so many gun-laden dhows that the usual Ghilzai caravans had returned to Kandahar almost empty-handed, with stories of British cruisers and gunboats blockading the coast. These stories quickly spread along the Frontier and caused intense anger.

Taking advantage of this favourable opportunity, the tribal Mullahs, or holy men, began to rouse the

warlike ardour of the truculent, fanatical tribesmen, preaching a Jehad, in the name of the Prophet, and promising that they should sweep back the British behind the Indus.

The bazaars, from Peshawar to Dera Ismail Khan, buzzed with ominous rumours of excited jirgahs, or meetings, of the tribal Elders; of armed lashkars raiding loyal tribes on the Frontier itself; of caravans pillaged in the passes. The stealing of rifles from military cantonments and from Frontier Posts became more frequent and more daring; it was known that the Afridis had reopened the primitive rifle factories they had long ceased to use; reports came in that the old men, who in days gone by had hammered out gun barrels and made clumsy locks, were passing from village to village, instructing the local blacksmiths in the forgotten art.

From all quarters came disquieting news, and daily it was becoming more evident that, could the tribesmen arm themselves effectively, the whole Frontier would be ablaze with revolt in the coming autumn.

Still more anxiety was caused by the unusual movements of the Ghilzais. For the last two seasons their caravans had been financial failures; in the last season they had found the Baluchi chiefs, through whose territory they had to pass, sullen and unfriendly; the Persian Governors of the coastal districts had not helped them, as before; everywhere the influence of the British made itself felt.

They had waited so long on the coast, the last year, in the vain hope of more cargoes of rifles slipping through the patrolling squadron, that the rivers and

water-holes of the Baluchistan mountains had dried up before they commenced the return journey; and they had suffered terrible privations before regaining their homes, losing many men, camels, and horses.

This year, this tribe of warrior-merchants determined to stand no nonsense; they had paid, in advance, for the rifles and ammunition still cramming the warehouses of Muscat, and if only they could coerce the Baluchistan chieftains and the Persians of the coast, the Muscat merchants had promised to find some means of hoodwinking the British ships and smuggling those rifles across to them.

To this end, some five thousand armed Ghilzais accompanied the customary caravans and distributed themselves, wherever forage and water could be obtained, among the Baluchi villages lying behind the mountain ranges which separated them from the Persian coast, some twenty to thirty miles farther south. On the arrival of this formidable band of Afghans, the local Baluchi chiefs quickly forgot the orders of the distant, feeble Persian Government, and received them with open arms. Securely placed in positions from which they could threaten any portion of the coast, they now hoped to compel the Persian Sirdars of the coastal districts to assist them.

This would be a more difficult task because these Sirdars were under the orders of the Derya Begi—the sometimes energetic Persian Governor of the coast; but one of the principal Sirdars at this time was a man named Mir Barkhat Khan, who controlled a hundred miles of convenient coast-line opposite Muscat, and as he had a fierce personal feud with the Derya

Begi, they expected that his loyalty could be easily tampered with.

Through his assistance chiefly, the Ghilzais trusted to gain their end—peacefully if possible, by force if necessary.

Briefly restated, the whole of the North-West Frontier was, at the beginning of 1911, seething with discontent, and if the tribesmen could obtain the rifles and ammunition which lay in Muscat there would be a general rising in the autumn.

The little British Naval Squadron in the Persian Gulf had to make sure that they did not get them.

Such was the condition of affairs when this story opens.

CHAPTER I

The "Apollo" at Muscat

H.M.S. *Apollo* lay in the little harbour of Muscat, half hidden in a cloud of coal-dust, while the derricks and winches of the disreputable-looking collier alongside her rattled and creaked, hoisting coal-bags from her almost empty hold, swinging them across and dumping them, with a thud, on the *Apollo's* battery deck.

She was a second-class cruiser of 3400 tons, carrying two 6-inch and six 4·7-inch guns, with a crew of 283 officers and men (including 32 lascar stokers), and commanded by Captain Stewart Williams, M.V.O. For the last six months she had been constantly patrolling the southern end of the Persian coast from Lingah, inside the Gulf, to Chahbar, outside it. Six weary months of monotonous steaming, and though she had overhauled and searched fifty dhows, scarcely a rifle had she seen. Other ships had luck; she had none.

Only during the last fortnight, a dhow which had eluded her had been sighted by the armed launch *Harold* next morning, chased ashore, and some 600 rifles and 20,000 rounds of ammunition captured or destroyed. A second dhow, unfortunately, had slipped

through farther along the 200 miles of coast-line and landed a small cargo.

Now the *Apollo* was filling up her bunkers before returning to her job, and her crew worked cheerily at the unpleasant business of filling coal-bags in the stifling hold of the collier, emptying them down their own bunker hatches, and stacking rows of filled coal-bags on each side of the battery deck to supply the needs of the armed launches.

The *Apollo's* boats had been moored some distance away to escape the coal-dust; and a Navy-man's eye would have noticed that two were missing—her two cutters—and he would have probably guessed that they were " down "—somewhere along the Persian coast. As a matter of fact, they had been there, off and on, for the past ten weeks, each in charge of one of the *Apollo's* lieutenants, with eight or nine armed men and a Baluchi interpreter, each with a maxim in her bows, lying off creeks known to be favourite places for gun-running dhows to try and land their rifles. The present crew had already been " down " for three weeks and were now waiting for the *Apollo* to come back and relieve them.

All day long the *Apollo's* crew toiled in their fog of coal-dust, under a cloudless sky, and although it was only the beginning of March the sweat poured down their faces and chests, grooving the thick layers of black dust which covered them. Not until long after dark, working by electric " group-lights ", had the bugler sounded " cease fire "; the Bos'n's mate piped " stand easy ", and, lighting their pipes, they watched the lumbering collier—her holds swept clean—slide

away into the darkness on her long voyage back to Cardiff.

A quarter of an hour later and the crew " turned to " to wash the dust from her white sides and grey upperworks, and make the *Apollo* look, once more, the dainty little lady they liked her to be.

Inshore, where Muscat lay, the battlements and towers of the two great Portuguese castles of Jelali and Merani loomed up, dark masses outlined against a velvety, starlit sky. A few lights showing on the curved shore between them came from the British Consulate away to the left, and from the Sultan's Palace at the other end. Behind this curved shore stood the walled town itself, under a ridge of jagged lava rocks crowned with watch towers. From these and from the battlements of the two castles the plaintive chanting of Arab watchers kept up a continual discord through the clear night air—Jelali calling to Merani that all was well with her; Merani answering back, and the watch towers inland crying, too, that their sentries were awake and alert.

Every now and again the sound of a rifle shot from the direction of the town showed that some foolish Arab soldier was enjoying himself in the bazaar, firing his rifle skywards to prove what a fine fellow he was.

An occasional drift of air brought across the black water a faint smell of the East; one or two fishing-boats crept out for their night's toil, and a cluster of Arab dhows made a blurred mass of shadows under the foot of Merani. Farther from the shore the Sultan's man-of-war, the *Najd*—a little dishevelled merchant steamer with a three-pounder gun on her fo'c'sle—lay

dark and deserted except for a dismal " riding " light on her forestay.

Seawards, a semicircle of grim lava rocks stood as a barrier to the swell the monsoon would bring in three months' time; but now they only showed as black masses of shadow melting into the dark sky above them.

A picturesque, peaceful little harbour and town it seemed, conjuring up wonders of past Portuguese greatness—three hundred years and more gone by—yet, not half a mile from where the *Apollo* lay at anchor, and within a stone-throw of the Consulate, probably that night a hundred thousand rifles and millions of rounds of ammunition crammed its warehouses, all destined—should Fate and the Prophet be willing and the British Navy cease its vigilance—to arm the turbulent tribes of the Indian North-West Frontier.

In the East, travellers come and go; no one knows whence they come or where they go; and it is probable that in the dimly lit bazaar, that same night, where the soldiers let off their rifles so light-heartedly, men of all the tribes on that Frontier and men of the Ghilzais—the warrior-merchants of Afghanistan—were, even then, discussing with the Muscat merchants and the nakhodas (captains) of the dhows schemes for outwitting the British Navy. Those peaceful, harmless-looking dhows, clustered together under Merani, were only waiting a favourable opportunity to risk a voyage across the Gulf, with a cargo of rifles hidden beneath piles of firewood or dried fish; and not a rifle, not a cartridge, could the British touch unless they seized them *after* they had left Muscat.

If this was not sufficient to make of Muscat a place

of adventure and cunning intrigue, the tribes of Southern Arabia were also in revolt against the feeble Sultan. Behind the ridge of lava rocks which shut off Muscat from the inland plains, the native chiefs were waiting the first opportunity to rush the one stony, tortuous defile which led through them, and seize Muscat and its store of rifles for themselves. That is why the sentries had to prove their wakefulness by their chanting, and why, every night at sunset, the three great gates in the walls were barred and bolted.

The Sultan trusted for his own personal protection and the safety of his throne to men of his own Beni Bu Ali tribe of Arabs, who formed his Palace Guard and the garrison of the two castles. So long as he did not actively assist in the gun-running business, he could rely, possibly with more confidence, on the British Political Agent in the Consulate, and the presence of a British cruiser—if one were wanted.

By nine o'clock that night the crew of the *Apollo* had washed her down, fore and aft; they had scrubbed their mess decks and were now scrubbing the coal-dust off their own bodies. Most of them as naked as when they were born, they splashed under the fire-hoses, skylarking and enjoying themselves to their hearts' content.

Aft, on the port side, by the break of the poop, the warrant officers—the fat, perspiring Bos'n; the thin, weather-beaten giant of a Gunner; and the haggard, shrivelled little Warrant Engineer—smoked their pipes in silence. On the starboard side, opposite them, the

wardroom officers gathered round their brass smoking-lantern.

Seven of them there were: the First Lieutenant, Lt.-Commander Sammy Dodington, who knew more about the Persian Gulf than any other naval officer in it; the nervous, rather irritable Staff Engineer, Shortlands; the plump, bearded Staff Paymaster, Lomax; the tall, anxious-looking Staff Surgeon, Hume; and the Captain's Clerk, Franklin, an irrepressible youth at present engaged throwing bits of bread to the excited little fish which swarmed in the circle of light at the foot of the accommodation ladder.

Peter Harrison, a Lieutenant, and Claude Marshall, the newly-joined Sub-lieutenant, completed the group.

Two others—two Lieutenants, Tommy Briggs and Jackson—made up the number of the wardroom mess; but these two were a hundred and fifty miles away, probably already coiled up, under the stars, sound asleep in the stern sheets of their cutters, under the Persian coast, with their blankets round them to keep off the night dew.

Peter Harrison's pleasant, good-tempered face already showed determination and self-reliance. His height and a slight stoop concealed the great strength of his muscular frame; he was a useful middle-weight boxer, and had, two years ago, fought his way into the semi-final of the sabre competition at the Army and Navy Tournament.

Claude Marshall, the Sub, although a sturdily built youngster, had such a very youthful expression, such big eyes, such very carefully tended black hair, and was so very particular and almost dainty about his dress

and appearance that he had already been nicknamed "Lady Jane". He was, however, quickly learning, and time and experience were soon likely to harden the somewhat effeminate lines of his face and mouth. He could certainly do one thing which his not-very-favourably impressed messmates could *not* do. Although his hands were almost ladylike, he could fire a service revolver and keep his bullets nearer the bull's eye than even the horny-handed giant of a Gunner who had won many prizes at Bisley in days gone by.

These last two had been told off to relieve Briggs and Jackson in the two cutters. Harrison had had much experience of boat cruising during the eighteen months he had served in the Persian Gulf, and bore an ugly scar across his right shoulder given him by an Afghan bullet last season; but this was to be the Sub's—Lady Jane's—very first adventure; and he had talked and thought of nothing else for the last ten days. He had, in fact, bored everyone with his enthusiasm, because after eighteen months of Persian Gulf climate there is little enough left of that.

"I've cut down two of my duck trousers; cut them off above the knees; and they make ripping shorts," he was telling Dodington, who had limped across to squat on a scrub-deck locker, because the thigh he had broken years ago, when a hawser had "parted", pained him after his long day's work. Sitting there with his cheery, red face, sucking a dirty pipe, he beamed on everybody and everything, perfectly content with his little world and to have finished yet another filthy coal-ship day.

" Well, Lady Jane," he said, smiling at the Sub's eagerness, " you have heard all I can tell you; you have the best month of the year in front of you; not too hot, no gales if you are in luck, and a first-rate petty officer in your boat to give you a leg up when you are in any difficulty. Keep your eyes skinned and don't play the fool. Those Afghan chaps are crowding down to the coast, and you'll have to be extra careful. You're ' top dog ' when you've got the cutter under you; they're ' top dog ' if you put your foot on the beach."

" I've made out a list of the Gulf lingo," Lady Jane went on. " Hallib—down sail, Bunduk—rifle, Bawawchi —cook."

" Bundari—that's the better word; just go along and see if the accommodation ladder is clean. If there is a speck of coal-dust on it, there'll be the dickens of a row when the Skipper comes off."

" Did he leave any orders?" Shortlands called across. " I've no orders for steam in the morning."

" Not a word, old chap; went ashore before the first bag came in, and won't be off till late—and you and I have jolly well to wait till he does come off."

" ' Our Willie ' is feeding at the Consulate; I hope he'll choke himself," chimed in the Clerk, who hated the Captain as much as he adored the First Lieutenant.

" Look here, young Clerk, you're not to call the Skipper ' Our Willie '," Dodington said severely.

" Well, everyone else does," the Clerk mumbled; " I don't see why I shouldn't."

" I wish to goodness we hadn't invalided our last skipper home," the Doctor said bitterly. " This chap

has only been here two months and has managed to turn everything and everybody upside down. The men simply loathe him."

"Never came across such a chap in my life," Shortlands growled, "and I really believe he thinks there's not such another skipper in the service."

"And a good job too—for the Navy," the Paymaster added.

By this time the marine servants had cleaned the wardroom and the officers' cabins, so the little group of officers gradually melted away. The crew piped down; the tired galley's crew pulled ashore for the Captain, and only Lady Jane (the Officer of the Day) and the quartermaster—Jones, the stern-faced petty officer who was to "mother" him in his cutter—remained on deck, talking about their coming enterprise and watching for the galley to come back.

"Here she comes, sir!" Jones cried presently. Lady Jane dashed into the wardroom to warn Sammy Dodington and the Staff Engineer, asleep in the armchairs; and at last, at half-past eleven, Captain Stewart Williams brought his galley alongside with a majestic sweep. As he stepped on board he held one hand up to the gangway light.

"Look at that, Mr. First Lieutenant, coal-dust! I can't trust you even to clean my ship. Put the Quartermaster in my report."

"Very good, sir," and Dodington, furious, watched him stalk aft to his cabin, without another word—a tall, stooping figure, with a small head set on sloping shoulders, a weak face, little uneasy eyes, and a mouse-coloured moustache and little pointed beard which

always twitched, in the most irritating manner, when he spoke.

Dodington limped into the wardroom, where the weary Staff Engineer waited for him. He shook his head. "Found a speck of coal-dust on his beautiful hands! Great Speckled Snakes! What a chap!"

On her way across the glittering Gulf next day, the *Apollo* intercepted a wireless signal from the paddle-wheel gun-vessel *Sphinx* to the Senior Naval Officer of the Gulf Squadron, the Captain of the *Intrepid*.

Both these ships were cruising off a stretch of the Arabian coast, a hundred miles north of Muscat.

The signalman brought it down to the wardroom.

"Yesterday landed and searched village of Rajab—captured 1500 rifles and much ammunition—two men severely wounded—request permission to land them at Muscat."

"Fifteen hundred! That's good work," the Paymaster chuckled, as he read it aloud. "The more the merrier."

But Lady Jane's face fell. "Fifteen hundred less for me to bag—on *this* side."

On the following morning the *Apollo* picked up the Persian coast and closed the headland of Kuh-i-Mubarak, between Bungi and Jask. She sighted Tommy Briggs sailing out in his cutter, and in half an hour he ran alongside, under the dangling boat's falls. She hooked on; both watches hoisted her out of the water to the level of the *Apollo's* hammock nettings; and Briggs—a most disreputable-looking officer, with a red beard—climbed on board.

Lady Jane, dancing with excitement and very self-conscious in his new war-paint of helmet, spotless white shirt, shorts, and gym shoes, with a soft white collar and service black tie round his neck, and a belt with a revolver and cutlass round his waist, jumped to meet him.

"Anything doing?"

"All serene! A few chaps on top of that point—over there; close to that old mud tower; pot at you if you go too close. They can't shoot for nuts."

"What are they—Afghans?" asked the excited Sub.

"Don't know; didn't go ashore and ask them." And Briggs and his red beard went for'ard to report himself to the Skipper first, then have a bath and a clean shave.

In half an hour Lady Jane, Jones, the quartermaster, and nine men hoisted the cutter's sails and slanted away inshore, Sammy Dodington calling after him: "Go slow! Keep your eyes skinned; we'll be back again in a week."

The *Apollo* slowly steamed along the coast to where, twenty miles farther to the north-west, Jackson and his cutter lay off the creek which led up to Sirik.

The *Harold*—armed launch—lay there too, all funnel, wireless masts, caged aerials, and grimed awnings. As the *Apollo* lost her way through the sea she towed Jackson's cutter alongside.

Harrison and his crew quickly remanned her.

"No news; nothing doing," Jackson told him. "Your old friend the Wali has a gazelle for you. No Afghans about," and Harrison shoved off, nobody

taking any more notice of him or his crew than if they had been merely going ashore to fetch off the marine postman—not so much, as a matter of fact.

It took a couple of hours to coal the *Harold* from the bags crowding the *Apollo's* battery, to fill her fresh-water tanks, and to pass across sacks of bread and the carcasses of a couple of sheep. Meanwhile her Skipper, the " 'Airy 'Onourable ", as he was generally called, having lunched well in the *Apollo's* wardroom, was now lying back in an armchair with a tankard of beer in one huge hairy hand, telling the others about the dhow he had driven ashore a fortnight ago.

He was a most extraordinary-looking man: short but immensely broad, with arms and legs like tree trunks—and the hairiest man you ever set eyes on. Sprawling back in that armchair, with his dirty cricket shirt open to the waist, and with white shorts which did not come half-way down his tremendous thighs, he looked like some great good-natured human gorilla—with a voice like a bellowing bull.

" She legged it ashore, you fellows," he bellowed. " Legged it so fast that her masts went over the side when she bumped. When I got alongside in the dinghy, with another little chap like myself, there were only two chaps aboard her. I knocked their dirty heads together and threw them out; the scoundrels wanted to knife me. We couldn't get her off—she'd stuck too hard—so we took out her rifles and burnt her—fine fireworks she made too when the ammunition started popping."

Just then the *Harold's* warrant officer—a fine-looking Gunner with trim beard, spotless white shirt and shorts

—came along and reported, "All ready, sir!"; so up got the Honourable Jimmy, shook himself, shot out a great arm, seized the astonished Captain's Clerk by his tunic, lifted him off the deck, put him down again, reached for his battered sun-helmet, roared out, "So long! you chaps!" and followed his second-in-command aboard the *Harold*.

In the *Apollo's* wardroom they could hear his roaring orders: "Let go, for'ard! Shove her off! Let go, aft!"

The *Apollo* then gathered way and resumed her weary patrol of that two hundred miles of arid coast.

In a week's time—more or less—she would come back again to see how things were "going".

CHAPTER II

Harrison's Armed Cutter

Written by Lieutenant Peter Harrison, R.N.

I have been at this job a good many times previously —and I don't know a better one. It gives me a little kingdom of my own; and what more can a man want?

The centre of it is my twenty-four-foot cutter, with a Maxim sticking up in the bows and a White Ensign at the stern; my " standing " army consists of nine sunburnt seamen and stokers—not counting the Baluchi interpreter; the limits of it are, out to sea, the horizon, and, inland, twenty miles of the sun-baked coast of Persia, just outside the Gulf. My unruly subjects are the riff-raff crowd of Arabs, Persians, and coast Baluchis from Kuhistak, in the north, to the mouth of the little Gaz River, in the south. The village of Gaz stands four miles up this river. Five miles along the coast there is another village—Sirik—up a mile and a half of winding creek, deep enough, at mid-tide, for a dhow to " pole " herself through it, until it broadens out into a basin, or " khor ", a mile long and half as broad, where she can lie, absolutely hidden from the sea, and land her cargoes at her ease. Sirik itself is on the far side of this khor.

I know it well—its tumbledown, crumbling mud fort, inside which the Wali shuts himself when trouble is " about ", its white, dome-shaped well, its hundred palm-leaf thatched mud huts, and its date-palm groves and lean hungry goats. The villagers live by fishing (you can smell the fish drying a mile off) and exchanging it for firewood from Arabia, on the other side of the Gulf.

That's what they can do when they are good; you will soon read what they do when they are not.

It's a thoroughly beastly place, with its dirty, skulking crowd of meek, helpless Persians, its ragged, cunning, half-caste Arabs and Baluchis—and I *love* it—and them; I wouldn't choose another spot to govern in the wide world. The Wali—the Headman—is the most plausible scoundrel of the crowd. If I pull up the creek at any time of the day to get water, buy a goat, or a not-much-larger sheep, he always invites me and my frightened interpreter " Adolphus " into his fort, brings out coffee, rolls me a vile-smelling cigarette, and tries to make me believe that he loves me as a brother, or as his own two wretched horses tethered in the courtyard among the goats and scarecrow-fowls, scraping up the litter of straw and manure. I know, precious well, that if he could only stick a knife into me without risking his skin he'd do it in a jiffy. In his dirty fez—covering, thank goodness, most of his greasy black hair—his dirty lungi and abba, stained and patched, his filthy baggy trousers tucked up above his knees, showing a pair of sun-cracked bare legs, and his brace of huge curved daggers and bandolier of cartridges, he looks the ragged, treacherous

ruffian that he is. He is actually a low-class Baluchi, but always protests that he is a good Persian who would never allow a rifle to be landed up *his* creek—not he; " for had not the great Derya Begi [1] said such things should not happen, and would come in his great warship and pull down his fort and burn his palm trees if any rifles did happen to escape him; so " (and he would spread out his hands and look at me ingratiatingly out of his narrow, cunning eyes) " why should I go to all the discomfort of living in my little boat off his creek? Gaz—Charak—Chiru—Kuhistak—yes! very bad men lived there; but his men, men of Sirik, very good men; very brave men too; not frightened of Afghans!"

If he thinks he can fool me by repeating these yarns every blessed time he meets me, I'm sorry for him. With that face he wouldn't diddle an infant in arms. As Smedley, my leading seaman, says: " It's 'ard on 'im to 'ave to carry a mug like that there around; it's a fair give away, that it is."

However, so long as he is amiable, helps us get water, sells us a sheep or a goat (you can scarcely tell the difference between them), sometimes sends me a gazelle shot in the hills six miles inland, gives me warning of any Afghans prowling round with their camels, and plays no hanky-panky tricks, I rather enjoy pretending to swallow all his childish nonsense.

The *Apollo* comes along, every seven days or so, to look at us, hear any news, give us anything we want,

[1] The Governor of the Persian Gulf Coast. He had one gun-vessel, the *Persepolis*, under his orders, and occasionally embarked on board her to inspect the coast.

and then go along the coast towards Jask, round the bend of the shore, to see how the other cutter " down " is getting on. When this yarn commenced Lady Jane —our new Sub—was in charge of her, getting his first experience of this job.

We sometimes see the *Harold*; but not often, because my old pal Jimmy is keeping an eye on a thirty-mile stretch of the coast farther to the north, and doesn't like to leave it.

We have a splendid time at this boat-cruising; the ten of us get on well together, and I wouldn't change it for anything else under the sun. There is, as a matter of fact, rather too much of the sun—even at this time of the year—for the sun is the very mischief at this end of the Persian Gulf, and you get to hate it like poison. However, there is generally a bit of a breeze inshore and up the Gulf during the day, and offshore down the Gulf at night; and living in the open air all the time, with the constant chance of something exciting turning up to sharpen your wits, keeps us all as fit as horses.

Exercise we get—when there are no dhows to overhaul—by pulling hard twice a day—once before the sun rises behind the hills inland and the skies are flamed with reds and crimsons, green and gold, and once before he plunges into the sea and we push the cutter through molten brass. You may bet that I do my share of the " pushing ".

With that, sometimes a swim close ashore with an eye for sharks, and sometimes a game of rounders on a sandy beach, we are as hard as nails. There is not a man who wants to go back to the *Apollo's* sultry

lower deck and the eternal pipes and bugles, " clean paint and bright work ", to say nothing of Our Willie twiddling the point of his silly beard at them, blithering about a spot of dirt he's found, or something or other amiss which doesn't matter a tinker's curse—not in this climate, anyway, after eighteen months of it.

Four stokers and five seamen make up my present crew, and a happy little crowd we are—all of us except stoker Jeremiah Tims, who doesn't enjoy being happy, and Adolphus, who spends most of the time crouched in the bows wondering how long before he gets his throat cut by his fond relatives ashore.

The best time of the day is from sunset to " pipe down ". We do our twenty minutes' pulling, anchor off shore, have our supper of, generally, tinned meat and ship's biscuit, and then I drag out the little barrico from under the stern-sheets, and Smedley serves out our tot of rum. Even Adolphus cheers up when he hears the bung pulled out.

Pipes are lighted, and we generally have a bit of a sing-song—songs with choruses. I bring the Naval Song Book with me, and we know it from cover to cover, shouting out, " There is a Tavern in the Town ", " John Peel ", " Clementine ", and a whole heap of others.

I often wonder if the chaps ashore hear the noise coming out of the dark, and what they think of it; they think it part of our religion, I expect. Perhaps it is; at any rate we always finish up with " God Save the King ".

Then we snuggle down as best we can, with our blankets round us to keep off the tremendous dew—

one man on the alert; pipes are knocked out overboard into the dark sea; conversation dies down and, presently, the only sound is the men snoring and the lap, lap of the water along the boat's side. That's the time when I generally write up my Journal, sitting in the stern-sheets with the book on my bare knees, the boat's lantern alongside, and a whiff of dried fish coming off with the land breeze.

When the moon shines—and the moon shines here as nowhere else in the world—those soft, quiet nights are wonderfully beautiful, the sea all round me flashing like silver, while the men lie sleeping and snoring in the dark shadow of the boat's awning.

My right-hand man is Smedley, a wiry little chap, a Londoner, full of rough-and-ready philosophy. His idea of argument is to knock the other man down first, and hear what he has to say about it afterwards. Roberts, a big able seaman, very keen to " better " himself, and O'Leary, a huge stoker, pulled the stroke oars; and you may be certain that the one wouldn't let the other beat him at that job. O'Leary looks a thorough villain; he's a regular picture gallery when stripped, tattooed all over his body with coiling snakes being eaten by eagles, skulls and crossbones, figures of women, and baskets of flowers. He is a devout Catholic, and has a big crucifix tattooed in the middle of his chest—where snakes and eagles leave any room. The others think that he has been a soldier before he joined the Navy. He certainly looks as though he'd spent half his life getting in and out of jail; but whatever his past has been he shuts down tight on it; does his work and does it well. On each of the four thwarts

I have a seaman and a stoker, and the " life " of the party is a stupid ordinary seaman, Reuben Wiggs. He hasn't the brains of a mouse; he can't be trusted to bang in the bung of a water barrico or take a rope's turn round a cleat; but he *can* fire a Maxim as no other man I know. There's nothing invented that can waste bullets so quickly as a Maxim—especially in a bobbing boat; but Reuben manages, somehow or other, not to play ducks and drakes with them. The Maxim is the joy of his life; he cleans it by the hour, and so long as Smedley is there to reassemble it after he's been " Just 'aving a look at it ", things go on all right. It's his stupid, half-comical, half-puzzled expression, when he's got himself in a hopeless muddle, and his silly excuses, which please the men so much.

Then, of course, there is that Jeremiah Tims, a weedy, soured old stoker, who thinks all the world " is up agin 'im "—and looks it. He volunteers for this boat work because then he only has nine " agin 'im ", instead of the two hundred and seventy-odd in the *Apollo*. So long as he keeps his sharp tongue still, for fear of being sent back to the ship, I let him stay. I feel rather sorry for him.

The other four—Wilkins, Brown, Scraggs, and Simmonds—are just ordinary, good-natured chaps, perfectly content with their lot; Simmonds, the young signalman, is the pick of them—a red-faced youngster, the only one of us who can't grow a hair on his face.

We don't wear many clothes at this job—sun-helmets, round ones and not the ordinary Navy pattern, a gauze vest, cotton shorts, and gym shoes. At night the men change into flannels, jumpers, and

duck trousers—if they want to do so; and I have a monkey jacket, a cricket shirt, sweater, and uniform cap in case of emergencies. What with the sun and the salt water, our faces get so cracked and sunburnt—burnt black—that shaving every day is impossible; so most of us grow beards—or try to—and mine gets quite respectable in a fortnight. The joy of taking it off and feeling clean again is the only reason one looks forward to getting on board the *Apollo* once more.

Of course, it is not all loafing during the day. Whenever a dhow pokes her sail in sight, we have to pull out, or sail out, make her heave to and down sail, then search her. You can imagine the delight of searching a dhow whose hold is chock-a-block with firewood, to say nothing of dried fish. It often takes four or five hours of hard work.

Since we left the *Apollo* this last time, we had overhauled only five dhows, all of them well-found vessels of from 120 to 200 tons, regular traders between Karachi and the Gulf. Their nakhodas would no more think of running rifles than of turning Christian; they are the local aristocrats of the sea, fine-looking Arabs, accustomed to deep-sea navigation, who take their own sights and work out their own reckonings. But then one day—in the forenoon—a dhow came slanting up over the horizon towards Sirik, a typically uncared-for, badly-found dhow of about fifty tons—just the sort you'd expect to run rifles if she had a chance. She saw the cutter lying off the creek, but came along and dropped her anchor close to us. Of course I pulled alongside, to " makee look see ". She had the usual firewood on board—her hold full of it

and a deck load as well; and while my men began to clear a way to her hatches, the nakhoda explained to Adolphus that he had two passengers on board for Sirik, and would warp up the creek, when the tide rose, to load a cargo of dried fish. I couldn't see much of the passengers, as they were so wrapped up in their burnouses and had their lungis drawn almost across their faces, although I noticed that one looked rather a weakling—only a youngster; but if they wanted to land at Sirik that was their business—not mine; and I paid very little attention to them.

For once the search turned out to be a pretty easy job, because the Sirik men came out in their boats presently and began unloading the firewood and taking it along down the coast towards Gaz. There was nothing unusual about that, and when sufficient had been cleared away for Smedley and myself to bang our rifle butts on her bottom boards in several places, we heard no "hollow" sound, and I was quite satisfied that she had no false bottom in which she could have stowed rifles.

It happened to be the afternoon on which I generally beached the cutter just inside the mouth of the Gaz River; so I sailed down there, dragged her ashore under a high sandbank, and commenced to take everything out of her before scrubbing her out with fresh river water.

This makes a pleasant change for the men, and so that they could skylark as much as they liked I took my shot-gun and strolled over the sandhills, hoping to bag a sand grouse in the camel-thorn and mimosa scrub sparsely scattered over it.

I had walked for perhaps half a mile, was out of sight of the cutter, and had just crossed the top of a sand-dune when a spurt of sand flew up at my feet, and I heard a rifle shot.

I flung myself on my face, wriggling back below the crest, and saw, for a moment, the head and shoulders of a man over the top of the next rise, perhaps three hundred yards away, and a second man, with a rifle, over to my left on the other side of the river.

It was no place for me with only a shot-gun in my hands, so, half-stooping, I legged it back towards the cutter, hearing two more rifles fired and the " crack " of the bullets as they missed me. I dodged down into the river bed, where the " going " was better, but had to pass across an open bit of sand and scrub, and more bullets whizzed past; but as the sun was already low down and glared in their faces I knew that the two men could not make good shooting. Then, much to my relief, the boat's crew came running towards me with their rifles; we threw ourselves down and waited to see what would happen. Nothing more did happen; so, as it would be dark in an hour and a mad thing to try and bag those chaps, we went back to the boat.

However, that put a stop to spending the night ashore; the beach was not a healthy place with those fellows —and probably many more—about; so, leaving Smedley and O'Leary on the top of the sandbank to keep a lookout until we had shoved the cutter back into the river and replaced all the gear, we pulled out to sea. Neither Smedley nor O'Leary had seen a soul, but a few bullets followed us as we cleared the river mouth.

This little episode gave us something to talk about,

and we were all laughing at Reuben Wiggs, who had come along with only a boat's stretcher in his hand. He kept on explaining that, " 'Twas the first thing I clapped me 'ands on; but I knowed as 'ow it wern't no rifle "—looking round, as much as to say, " I'm not such a fool as all that."

I knew, of course, that those chaps we had seen were not coast Baluchis and that whether they belonged to a tribe up the hills or were a couple of those Afghans we have heard so much about lately, there were probably a good many more close at hand. That could only mean one thing—that they were waiting for a dhow to run in with rifles.

I naturally thought of that dhow whose bottom boards we had thumped; so pulled back to Sirik, intending to search her again or follow her up the creek, if she had gone in with the tide. If I could get abreast the Wali's mud fort, I could help him beat off any raiders—if he wanted to beat them off—and might persuade him to try even if he did not want to do so. A few " bursts " of Maxim belt would soon make him realize on which side his bread was buttered.

The dhow *had* disappeared, and by the time we had pulled into Sirik creek it had become quite dark. I had not gone a hundred yards before bullets came splashing round us. One splintered the gunwale, and I heard Dismal Jimmy—as they called Jeremiah Tims —call out, " They be firin' at me, they B'looks be; at me in pertickler," so I knew that it had hit the boat close to him.

Perhaps I should have gone on and chanced running the gauntlet of the mile and a half of creek, chancing

to escape damage in the darkness; but almost immediately after those first few shots we heard a perfectly furious fusilade from far away in the direction of Sirik itself. I knew then that the Wali was being raided and that even if I did get through the creek it would be madness to try and help him in the dark. If my cunning old friend had had time to shut himself and his men in the fort, he could keep those chaps out until daylight; and then I would dash up and see how things were going.

I turned the boat round, pulled out, and anchored a hundred yards or so from the shore. Things soon became quiet, the rifle firing died down, the moon came out (it did not give enough light for my job), we had our supper, and " piped down " for the night.

I slept soundly, as usual, and was turned out at five o'clock; we made our cocoa in the dark, drank it down with a bit of ship's biscuit, and then, with Reuben in the bows with his Maxim and with the men's rifles handy beside them, we pulled into the creek as the dawn broke—pulled in with the tide bubbling along under us.

CHAPTER III

Harrison Captures a Dhow

Written by Lieutenant Peter Harrison, R.N.

Once inside that creek, the high sandbanks on either side gave such perfect cover to any Baluchi or Afghan who might be on the prowl, that the men instinctively grasped their oars more tightly and pulled a faster stroke. Then a turn in the creek shut out the sea, and we found ourselves with such a limited view—sandbanks above our heads to port and starboard, and sand-dunes one behind the other in all directions—such an unpleasant place to be ambushed that I didn't like it one little bit.

" 'Ow about sending a couple of us on each bank, sir?" Smedley suggested respectfully; " let 'em go a'ead a little, and the rest pull easy-like with the tide." It was my idea too; so I sent him and Wilkins, an ordinary seaman, to climb up the port bank, and O'Leary, with Scraggs, another stoker, on the other side. " Keep one sandhill in front—keep well apart and shoot if you see anything," I told them as they seized their rifles, waded to the banks on either side, and clambered up them.

The huge O'Leary didn't require any instructions; he bolted for the next sandhill, with Scraggs after him,

threw himself down, and crawled up it to look over the top.

As we pushed on in the cutter we saw him dash for the next ridge, waving to Scraggs to keep farther away.

Smedley and Wilkins, on the other bank, whenever we caught sight of them, were sticking together, taking as much precaution as a couple of schoolgirls picking buttercups. They seemed to think every scraggy chump of camel-thorn—which couldn't conceal a rabbit—had an Afghan behind it, and beat it with the butt ends of their rifles. They soon lagged *behind* the cutter, and I shouted to them to get on ahead and keep apart. This stirred them a little, but the next time I saw them they were *standing* on top of sand-dunes, looking casually round like a pair of fools. If any Afghan had been within half a mile he must have taken a shot at them; so, though I cursed their stupidity, I knew perfectly well that none of our friends were on that side.

The creek twisted again, and we heard occasional firing away in the direction of Sirik; so I imagined that the Wali *had* shut himself up in his fort and was still holding out. Just then I saw O'Leary—a quarter of a mile ahead—signalling in morse with his rifle. Simmonds, the signalman, took it in. " No enemy in sight, sir!" he repeated.

As the creek now began to widen out into the shallow khor, or basin, at the other end of which Sirik stood, I waved to him to come back.

Back he came, with Scraggs, and waded out to us. " It's all clear, sir; there's shooting going on in the village."

" Where did you learn that morse?" one of my chaps asked him; but he said nothing, stepped over the gunwale, and laid out his oar.

Then there came a shout from the others which made me look round. Reuben, yelling " I sees 'em!" swung his Maxim round. On the other side, a couple of hundred yards astern, I caught sight of a couple of heads just showing over a ridge. Reuben was just going to press his firing button when we realized that they belonged to Smedley and Wilkins, who came along, shamefacedly enough, and climbed into the boat while the others chaffed them. " Turn out many rabbuts? Doing a bit of scouting in the rear? Proper leather necks you be;" and Reuben bleated out: " I'd 'ave 'ad both of 'em; shot 'em through the yed, that I would; but I clean forgot to press the button; clean went out o' me yed."

Smedley was very upset. " I've never had the job to do afore, sir; I'll do better next time." While O'Leary tugged away at his oar and said nothing; but I caught his eye once, and there was certainly a twinkle in it.

We were well in the khor now, and I saw the Wali's mud fort above the date palms and, just beyond the fort, that little dhow we had examined yesterday. Half a dozen native boats were round her.

A good deal of random shooting was going on—not at us—and directly the chaps in the dhow and those boats saw the cutter splashing towards them they began yelling and jumping from the dhow. The boats started off towards the village and the fort. My fellows lay back to their oars, and we shoved the cutter along for all we were worth to try and cut them off. Some

bullets did come our way then; but we were too excited to worry.

We had such a long way to pull that I feared they would all escape, and they did; all except one miserable little boat with two men paddling for dear life which appeared round the stern of the dhow and fairly ran into my arms.

I broke one of her paddles as I crashed alongside, nearly capsizing her; a chap squatting there pulled out a pistol, but O'Leary's oar knocked him over before he could fire it, and the other two men dived overboard and swam for their lives. Smedley jumped into her, and I left him and pulled for the beach, still hoping to catch another boat which had dropped astern of the others. But I had not pulled twenty strokes before the cutter grounded and a crowd of chaps on the beach began firing at us.

I shouted to Reuben to turn his Maxim on to them; he found the firing button right enough this time, and as the gun went rat-a-tat-tat-tat the crowd ashore darted for the cover of the mud huts and date palms and left off irritating us.

Leaping into the water, we shoved her off, jumped in, and backed towards the little boat. Reuben, ceasing fire, called out: " I cawn't see nothink to fire at." He wasn't such a fool as he looked, not when he had that job.

Only a few shots followed us, and even these stopped when we got alongside Smedley and the boat. He held up a couple of rifles and called out: " A whole bundle of 'em, sir!" We gave a whoop of glee; these were almost the first we had set eyes on this season.

" That chap ain't come to yet," Smedley said, pointing to the huddled heap in the bottom of the boat. I gave him a rope's end and towed him to the dhow, which lay, quite deserted, a couple of hundred yards farther out.

We scrambled on board, looked down her after hatchway, and saw that some of her bottom boards had been ripped up and that there *was* a double-bottom space. I knew that game well enough, but it beat me why we had failed to discover it by banging our rifles on it yesterday—in the very same spot too.

Smedley soon found the reason; he crawled through the gap, wriggling like an eel, and came up again, grinning, with his hands full of *sand*. " It's packed tight as a drum, sir, farther for'ard." We tore up more planks, scooped away more sand, and found another bundle of rifles. We were passing these on deck when O'Leary called from the cutter, wanting to know what he should do with " that there Afghan; 'e's a-coming round ".

I sang out for him to bring him on board the dhow.

What with keeping an eye on the shore and lending a hand as they dug out more rifles, I was much too excited to worry about our prisoner, but when I had time I saw him sitting on the deck aft, lashed up with the tiller ropes and his hands tied behind his back. He glared at me in a stupid, half-dazed fashion, and I saw immediately that we had caught no ordinary coast Baluchi.

His burnous had fallen open, and under it showed a richly embroidered jacket over a shirt of white silk. A fillet of twisted camel hair round his head secured

the red-and-white striped lungi over his turban, and tucked under the folds of his waist scarf he had two large carved daggers with handles and cases studded with silver knobs and silver filigree work. On one foot he had a green leather slipper embroidered with gold thread; the other was bare.

As he twisted his head to shake himself conscious his lungi became unfastened at the throat, and I made a grimace when I saw that a huge scar covered all the left side of his neck and the lower part of his left cheek. It looked as though the whole of the left jaw had been blown away at some time. The thick black beard on one side and that awful bare scar on the other gave him a horrid appearance.

" 'E's a bit of a nob, 'e is; 'ad a few tidy scraps in 'is time, sir," O'Leary said, handing me a Mauser pistol. " Picked that up in the boat—under 'im."

He had his other slipper too, and, kneeling down, stuck it on the bare foot; he then drew the lungi gently across the scar and fastened it with a brooch which had come undone—a brooch fashioned from a tiger's claw—gave him a friendly pat on the shoulder, and put him in a more comfortable position.

" 'Twas my oar what knocked 'im silly," he explained, and lighted a cigarette. He held out another to the Afghan, who stuck out his lips for it and sucked at it stupidly when O'Leary lighted it for him.

" You'll do all right, old buck," O'Leary said, and I'll swear that the chap gave him a grateful look. I turned away, smiling, for Smedley had shouted from below that he had cleared the false bottom. " Thirty-two bundles, sir."

That meant 640 rifles—a grand morning's work; but, judging by the space cleared before we boarded the dhow, another ten or twelve bundles—200 rifles and more—had probably been taken ashore.

I felt so angry to have missed finding the lot yesterday that I meant to get hold of those two hundred if I possibly could.

Leaving Wilkins and stoker Brown in the dhow, we jumped into the cutter and pulled ashore without any real idea what we should do. Perhaps we could communicate with the Wali in his mud fort.

The chaps near the beach cleared away when they saw us coming and then fired a few wild shots; but I held up a boat-hook with my spare white cricket shirt tied to it by the arms, and they stopped firing. A hundred yards from the shore I made the men paddle easy, saw the Afghans—or whatever they were—crowding back to the beach without their rifles, so went in to within fifty yards—there was plenty of water now—and lay on my oars, with Reuben at his Maxim in case of trouble.

Adolphus, shaking with fear, tried to yell across that I wanted to speak to their chief. He made himself understood presently, and a finely dressed man elbowed his way through the crowd and came down to the water's edge.

"Tell him that we'll give up our prisoner if he sends off the rifles," I told Adolphus.

When he understood this he went back, and the others gathered around him—some thirty or more.

Almost immediately afterwards a couple of armed men came down from the fort with an old man between

them. I knew the old white beard; it belonged to the Wali's head man, a more plausible scoundrel—if possible—than his master. He held up a piece of paper, calling across to us with his old cracked voice and beckoning for us to come and fetch it.

" Paper—letter—from Wali," Adolphus explained.

Well, I wasn't such a fool as to do that. The moment the cutter's bows touched the beach those chaps would be on us with their knives; a dozen white shirts on boat-hooks wouldn't keep them off, truce or no truce.

When the old chap realized that we were not born idiots, he bunched up his dirty cloak and waded out. What a scoundrel he looked—the old fox!

Adolphus translated the scrawl as best he could—a piteous letter from the Wali to say that these fierce Afghans (so they *were* Afghans) had pounced on his village at night and now he was shut up in his fort. So what could he do? He couldn't come and see me, and he couldn't prevent rifles being landed. He prayed to Allah that the great Derya Begi would not hear about it, and he begged me to come ashore and rescue him. If I wouldn't do that, would I let the Afghans have the rifles still on board the dhow, because if they did not get them they would burn his village and his boats and his palms? He ended up by begging me to send ashore a very great friend of his, a poor merchant from Muscat to buy fish, a very good man, very fond of English people. If I'd only do all this, he would never cease to pray to Allah the Magnanimous, the Rewarder of good actions, and the Fountain whence flowed everlasting joys, and get him to pour the Fruits of his Beneficence on me for the rest of my life.

It was jolly nice of the old rascal, but if I did venture ashore he would not have to do much praying, and Allah wouldn't have time to shell out many " Fruits of his Beneficence "—perhaps a minute and a half before each of us was lying on the sand with our eyes gouged out and our throats cut.

If he thought he could bamboozle me with this long-winded yarn, he was as much a fool as I knew he was a knave.

I sent back a message that I should stay there until all the rifles landed from the dhow had been given up, and that if he opened fire on the Afghans I'd do my best to help him. You should have seen the leer on the head man's face as he waded back.

I waited to see what would happen, and presently that first Afghan who had spoken to Adolphus stalked down to the water's edge and called across in a deep voice:

" He say rifles all in village—send men bring them—take much time," Adolphus interpreted. At the same time the men on the shore began to scatter, presumably to look for, or pretend to look for, those rifles. So I hung on where I was, wondering what I should do if they did fetch them out to us, for two hundred rifles would fill the cutter. We should be snowed under with them all and quite helpless to pull her out, let alone defend ourselves.

I would make them bring them off in the village boats, and told Adolphus—a little less frightened now—to explain what I wanted.

These boats lay on the shore perhaps a hundred yards to the left of where we lay, and actually nearer

the dhow, and when the chief of those chaps understood what was wanted he went away, and almost immediately men began streaming down to the boats, hauling them to the water's edge and launching them. I saw a couple of bundles of rifles brought down too, and could hardly believe that we were to get them back so easily.

Then a couple of men came towards us carrying a dead sheep; two more followed with baskets on their shoulders. They called to us:

"Chief send sheep—send plenty good dates," Adolphus told me.

As these four men had no rifles, and a present such as that was customary, I waved to them to come to us. They waded out and had nearly reached us when Smedley and one or two of the others yelled, "Look, sir! Look!" pointing towards the native boats. Turning round, I saw a crowd of armed men getting on board them, and three or four were already splashing off towards the dhow. I realized that I had been tricked, that all this palaver and these presents had only been a dodge for keeping me where I was.

I yelled to the men to back oars, and to Reuben to be ready with his Maxim; the man with the boat-hook and my shirt flung it down and seized his oar, and the four chaps fled ashore with their presents.

Bullets came ripping past, and as the Maxim commenced Adolphus threw himself into the bottom of the boat.

"Give way, starboard; back, port!" I yelled again. We lashed the cutter round and dashed after the native boats, firing at them with the Maxim because it would

not now bear on shore. Wilkins and the other man aboard the dhow began firing at them too.

They saw that their little scheme had failed, stopped pulling, and then splashed their way back to the shore, letting off their rifles at us as they went. For perhaps a couple of minutes—though it seemed like hours—bullets " cracked " past us in hundreds and splashed the water in spurts all round the cutter—a perfect hailstorm; chips flew out of the stern-sheets beside me, my helmet was knocked off; Jeremiah gave a yell, dropped his oar, got hold of it again and pulled feebly; Roberts, just in front of me, gave a gasp and fell off his thwart; Smedley jumped to his oar as I seized the helm; Scraggs swore an oath, missed stroke, but carried on again, blood running down his chest.

Then the firing ceased; the dhow lay just ahead, and with another twenty strokes I steered alongside the side farther from the village. Scrambling on board her, I looked ashore. Men dragged those boats out of water; others seemed to be carrying a couple of wounded; not thirty men could I see; not a single one under the mud fort.

We got Dismal Jerry and Roberts out of the cutter, and Scraggs, covered with blood, managed to climb up. Roberts was dead—shot clean through the heart, poor fellow; Jerry had a wound through both thighs, made, I imagine, by the same bullet; Scraggs had a deep furrow in front of his left shoulder—a tremendous gash.

Reuben and Smedley fetched the " first-aid " bag, and the three of us did what we could with the pads

and bandages and the bottle of iodine, while the Afghan looked on impassively.

Scraggs had the worst wound—or it looked the worst—because the bullet had cut like a knife through skin and muscles; the skin edges had drawn apart, and the cut ends of the muscles showed between. I soaked it with iodine, covered it up, and bound his arm across his chest as best I could. All this must have given him great pain, but so long as he had a cigarette in his mouth he scarcely winced.

Jerry's four holes looked slight enough—just as though someone had pushed a slate-pencil through the skin—but his legs were already so stiff that he could hardly bend his knees.

We wrapped poor Roberts in his blanket and laid him aft, out of sight, and I sent the rest of the men to clean the blood away from the stern-sheets of the cutter; Reuben cleaned his Maxim.

Then Smedley and I talked things over and decided to stay where we were and await events. They might still bring off those rifles if they really wanted our prisoner, and now that Roberts had been killed we were keener than ever to get them. It was nearly midday by this time, so I made the men have something to eat and had some ship's biscuit and corned beef myself. I served out a tot of rum and then filled a pipe, but had scarcely taken a dozen whiffs when a solitary boat came along bringing that dead sheep and the baskets of dates and two letters—one from the leader of the Afghan raiders and one from the Wali. The first gave a thousand apologies and excuses for having broken the truce; the Wali backed his yarns

with others just as false. They both promised that the rifles should be sent off if I would release the prisoner.

I sent back an answer that they must send them off to me two boatloads at a time, and that if more than two came together I would fire on them. I promised that the prisoner should go ashore when I was satisfied that all the captured rifles had been sent off, but that if they were not all on board in two hours I should shoot him. The last bit was, of course, only bluff.

However, they did send them off; sent them off within an hour—fifteen bundles of them. Smedley and I both agreed that they could have no more, so we unlashed our Afghan and helped him to his feet. I thought of returning his Mauser pistol but decided not to do so. He walked across to where O'Leary leant up against the side of the dhow. He held out his hand and O'Leary gripped it; then he bowed gravely to me, climbed down into the native boat, and was paddled ashore.

"That makes nigh on a thousand rifles, sir," Smedley said, as we looked at the bundles and loose rifles strewn in heaps on the deck and down below. "Poor chap, Roberts, sir; there's a girl waiting for 'im at 'ome. But we've got 'em all, sir."

Yes, we had got them all; but now that we had them and I had time to think about it, I'm hanged if I knew how we could get them away.

The tide ebbed fast; in half an hour there would be scarcely enough water in the creek for the cutter, still less for the dhow, if we tried to tow her out.

"How about burning her?" Smedley suggested; but he knew as well as I did that unless we soaked

her in paraffin she would not burn, and we had none. It would be quite useless, too, to scuttle her, because she lay almost aground at low water, and the Afghans would scarcely wet their feet, fishing up the rifles, when once our backs were turned.

" It seems to me, sir," Smedley said, scratching his head, " that that there creek ain't going to be no easy matter to get through, whether we takes the dhow along of us or leaves 'er 'ere. If them Afghan chaps want to play the dirty on us, they can do it there; do it easy; us 'aving only six chaps for the oars now, not counting yourself, sir."

" I expect that they will clear out—will get along back to the hills," I told him, but felt none too confident that they would.

They very soon made it plain as a pikestaff that they had no intention of doing this, because, as we watched the crowd which had gathered on the beach when our prisoner landed, a large party moved away in the direction of the creek. I followed them with my telescope until they reached the mouth of it, saw some of them splash across it to the opposite bank, and told Smedley.

We looked at each other and realized well enough why they had exchanged those rifles for our prisoner, so readily.

" They reckon as 'ow they've got 'im, they've got us and the rifles as well, sir; fair bottled in we be, sir," Smedley said grimly.

CHAPTER IV

A Night Attack

Written by Lieutenant Peter Harrison, R.N.

" Bottled in, and them's the cork—right enough!" Smedley muttered, jerking his thumb towards those Afghans crossing the mouth of the creek. " And who's a-going to draw it? That's what I asks!" and he scratched his head.

" Not as bad as it looks," I told him; " the *Apollo* will be back in a day or two, and we can stick it out till then. If she doesn't come, the *Harold* will—probably."

" That's all very fine, sir; but what 'appens? She comes along, sees we ain't where we oughter be, and sends in a boat to 'ave a look—and they'll get it in the neck—proper."

" The Skipper wouldn't do that till he had fired a gun and waited for us to come out," I said. " We could fire off the Maxim; he'd guess that something was wrong and send a lot of chaps ashore."

" Fat lot of good a-firing the Maxim, sir—begging yer pardon—but from here to where the *'Pollo* will be lying is summat over eight miles—a fat lot of Maxim she'll 'ear, sir, with the breeze blowing ashore all day. And if the *'Arold* comes along that there 'airy

'onorable won't wait two jiffys, sir, 'e outs 'is dinghy and like as not paddles up that there creek on his lonesome. There won't be much more beer for 'im—after that, sir."

We tried to think of some means by which we could let them know of the Afghans along the creek. I thought that it might be possible to signal across the three miles of sand-dunes which separated the khor in which the dhow lay from the sea. I sent Simmonds to the dhow's crazy masthead to find out and climbed up myself; but that scheme wouldn't do; the sand-dunes shut us in completely. We didn't stay up the mast many minutes, because the two of us up there made so tempting a target that a dozen bullets went flick! flack! past us before we climbed down again.

" We'll 'ave to send Simmonds, sir; land 'im t'other side of this bit of water and let 'im find his way across them there sand'ills to the sea. 'E can signal off and tell 'em of those Afghan chaps in that creek."

I do believe that Smedley worried more about the chaps who would come in to find us than about what would happen to ourselves.

This plan seemed feasible; it would mean, however, losing one more hand, and it could not possibly be done in the daylight. Probably fifty pairs of eyes were watching us at this moment, and Simmonds would be followed and killed in no time.

" Right you are, Smedley; we'll send him to-night —send him in that native boat we captured this morning; we can't do anything till dark."

" We're a-going to be pretty busy to-night, I reckon, sir," he said. " Them chaps'll reckon they can't 'ang

round 'ere till Christmas. They knows the *'Pollo* will be a-coming along—just as well as us—and won't waste no time when it's dark."

"Afghans never attack at night," I told him.

"Well, you wait and see, sir; we've got a thousand rifles aboard, remember that."

I looked round at the men. They had finished cleaning the cutter's stern-sheets and were now all on board the dhow, all except Reuben, who still cleaned his Maxim. Four of them—Scraggs among them—had cleared away a space free from rifles and sand, and were sitting on the deck smoking and playing cards. They seemed perfectly happy and entirely unconcerned. Dismal Jerry lay on his back snoring; Adolphus crouched under the dhow's side peering towards the shore.

It was no good explaining to them that we were in about as tight a hole as we could well be; I had to get them out of it—Smedley and I between us.

We had plenty of food, and if the Afghans did attack at night—and I did not think they would—we had the Maxim, our rifles, plenty of ammunition, and seven of us to use them—six if I sent Simmonds ashore.

"How about water?" I asked Smedley, and sent him away to find out.

He came back cursing. "They've drunk most of it, the fools; there's scarce 'arf a barrico left, sir."

However, we found an old barrel under the dhow's poop nearly full of rather brackish water, good enough to make our cocoa. We had enough, with care, for twenty-four hours, so I had the barrico brought out of the cutter and placed alongside the barrel,

and covered them both with my monkey jacket.

"Look here, you chaps!" I told the men. "We may have to stay here a couple of days before the *Apollo* comes along, and water's short; it's got to be rationed. No one is to touch a drop without orders."

"Right, sir!" they answered cheerily, and went on with their cards.

I did not leave them for long in peace. If we were attacked, the dhow was in no condition for defence. Bundles of rifles, loose rifles in heaps, piles of sand, hatch-cover boards, the bottom boards we had ripped up, sails and ropes littered the whole deck. It took us a couple of hours' hard work to clear everything down below and cover up the hatchways. That gave us room to walk about easily. We lowered Roberts, poor chap, below, and laid him on the rifles for which he had given his life. If the Afghans did come along, the Maxim would not be of much use down in the cutter's bows; so we brought it on board and fixed it, with its clamps, to some boards on the poop, the highest part of the deck. We did this quite openly, and no doubt the people ashore saw it clearly. It would give them something to think about.

The men began asking questions, so I explained what might happen and told them that we couldn't get out of the creek, even if we abandoned the dhow and the rifles—that we should have to "stick it" and make the best of it. I took Simmonds aside and told him what I meant him to do—paddle to the opposite shore in that native boat—hide it, if he could—find his way across the sand-dunes to the sea, and wait there until the *Apollo*, or possibly the *Harold*, came along to look for

us. He would have to attract their attention, wave his signal flags; and when they sent in a boat for him he must then explain about the Afghans along the creek and how we were " fixed ".

He knew the danger, just as well as I did, but took on the job cheerfully enough.

" When you do get across to the seashore, keep out of sight as much as possible; it may be a couple of days before the *Apollo* comes," I told him.

I could only spare him two water-bottles full of water, but made him fill his haversack with biscuits, corned-beef, and as many dates as he could stuff in it. I gave him my revolver and some packets of cartridges.

Smedley rummaged under the poop where the dhow's crew had lived, and found an Arab cloak and a long scarf. We told him to take them with him and wear them in the daytime—at anyrate they would help to disguise him.

As the paddles had disappeared from the little native boat, the men got the cutter's axe, and with this and their knives made two rough ones out of the dhow's bottom boards.

By the time we left off working the sun was getting low, and we all had had just about enough; it had been much warmer inside this khor than out at sea, and the air had been, if possible, more moist and clammy. I felt very tired and would have given all I had for a long, cold drink. I actually had not had a drop of fluid, except that tot of rum, since our morning cocoa before we pulled into the creek at dawn; but I could not be the first to go to that barrico under

my monkey jacket. So I chewed a bit of biscuit and smoked my pipe.

Everything ashore seemed absolutely quiet. Not a shot had been fired at us since Simmonds and I had climbed down from the masthead, and scarcely a soul moved about among the huts of the village or on the foreshore among the boats lying there. The hills inland began to glow with the setting sun; the glow even coloured the Wali's mud fort and the sand-dunes which separated us from the sea—the sand-dunes across which Simmonds had to find his perilous way after dark—lay a blaze of golden ridges below the usual marvellous colouring of the sunset.

It all looked most extraordinary peaceful; so peaceful that when some villagers came down to the boats, carried two of them to the water, loaded them with fishing-nets, and began paddling away to the head of the khor—the end farthest from the creek—I scarcely gave them a thought. I watched them lay out their nets in a long line right across the top of the khor, the wooden floats and the thick grass rope from which the nets hung showing like a string of beads just above the surface. I watched the fishermen paddle back, paying out the net rope for hauling it ashore. They drew their boats out of the water, pulled them up the beach, and disappeared, and I thought no more of them or their nets.

The sun sank. A few minutes of twilight followed, and then a half moon, and the stars gave quite enough light for us to see the white line of the shore, the dark mass of date palm trees and the mud fort above it—quite enough to see any boats coming towards us. In

fact, so long as we kept a good lookout I had not the least fear of the Afghans surprising us; no fear at all until the moon set. From that time until sunrise would be two rather anxious hours; they would be almost pitch dark, and it was then that I intended sending Simmonds on his very perilous task. But, as you know, I never expected to be attacked, even during those two dark hours, however much Smedley shook his head when I told him so. In fact, I felt quite pleased with myself, relied upon the *Apollo* coming to relieve us next day, and make certain of our thousand rifles; they were worth all the danger and risk—even perhaps poor Roberts.

We had supper. The dhow felt the incoming tide and swung round with her bows pointing towards the creek, and the shore breeze began blowing across her towards the sea.

" How are the legs?" I asked Dismal Jerry, dismally munching a biscuit with his back against the hatchway and his legs in front of him, stiffly.

" Aching summat cruel, sir," he whined.

But Scraggs only complained of being stiff, with " a bit of an ache ". He asked if he could have that Mauser pistol; said that the magazine was full and that he knew how to use it.

" D'you think they'll attack us during the night?" I asked O'Leary.

" Yes, I do, sir, and they'll begin sniping at us afore long."

" How do you know?" I said; but he only muttered, " That's what I thinks," and " shut down ".

Then Smedley had another idea—nothing seemed

to tire him or his active brain. He wanted me to weigh the dhow's anchor.

"What with the breeze and the tide, we could drift a couple of hundred yards farther away from that there village," he said, when he saw that I didn't much care about the job of hauling in the great grass hawser and heaving the grapnel anchor out of the mud.

"'Twill give 'em farther to pull and give us more time to fire at 'em, sir," he argued.

So we started on this job, man-handling the hawser until we had the dhow's bows over the anchor. This made no noise, but when we took a few turns of hawser round the clumsy winch and commenced to lever it round it creaked and squealed like nothing on earth.

The dhow's crew ashore must have recognized the noise of their beastly winch, and probably thought that we intended to get her out to sea—that we had some dodge up our sleeves to tow her out through the creek even against the tide. They must have stirred up the Afghans, because rifles began cracking and bullets coming our way in numbers, but not close enough to be dangerous, as it was impossible to see the rifle sights in that light. We had just got the anchor out of the mud when the man on the lookout shouted that boats were coming off.

Turning round, I saw perhaps a dozen dark shapes of boats splashing towards us, and rifles firing raggedly from them. We dashed for our rifles, and Reuben ran aft to his Maxim. We opened fire, but just as they couldn't aim properly at us we could not at them, and the men in the boats only pulled the faster, yelling

fiercely. Reuben shouted that he couldn't get his gun to fire—not in the dark.

Smedley and I leapt aft. He felt round and found the end of the belt not pulled through properly, and jerked it into place. Then at last Reuben got going.

It was a " different pair of shoes " with the Maxim. He could see the line of splashes the bullets made, and he splayed them on those dark boats. In half a minute their yells turned to shrieks, and they began pulling back to shore faster than they had come, all except one, which drifted up the knor, not a sound coming from it.

I told Reuben to cease fire. " No delay next time," I said angrily.

" I forgot about the belt, sir. Never gave 'e a thought," he tried to explain, trembling with excitement.

" Well, that's that, sir!" Smedley said, as we breathed again. " That was an easy job. Just wait till the moon goes, sir."

As we went for'ard to the bows more rifle firing broke out; but by this time the dhow, with her anchor up, had begun to drift away from the village, and the bullets were harmless. We waited until the land breeze and the tide had swept us quite five hundred yards away from the village, then dropped the anchor and made the hawser fast. We all felt quite pleased with ourselves, and that we had taught the Afghans a lesson they were not likely to forget.

It was just about nine o'clock, and I imagined that we should now be left in peace until the moon set shortly after four. So I made the men wrap themselves

in their blankets and, leaving Smedley and one hand on watch, lay down myself. I slept very soundly, so soundly that not until Smedley woke me at midnight and told me that they had been sniping from shore all through his watch had I heard a single rifle shot. Except for this occasional sniping, everything seemed peaceful ashore, and the dhow lay in the moonlit khor with her bows now pointing away from the creek. The tide already ebbed.

"Them there fishing-nets 'ave drifted across our 'awser," Smedley told me, and we looked over the low bows and saw a couple of floats and the net rope tangled in our anchor rope; the rest of the floats, dark "blobs" on the surface, stretched in a long curved line away from us. We thought of turning the men out and cutting them adrift, but—I suppose that I was woolly-headed with sleep and Smedley woolly-headed for want of it—we decided that it wasn't worth disturbing them.

Nothing happened, except the irritating sniping (O'Leary had been right about that), until four o'clock, by which time the moon was low down over the sand-dunes. Then I turned everybody out, saw that they had their cutlasses, made certain that their rifle magazines were charged, told Smedley to stand by Reuben and the Maxim, and told Simmonds to get ready. I hated doing this because the risk was so great.

We had something to eat and a small drink of water, and then the moonlight disappeared and left nothing but the faint light of the stars on the dark surface of the water and the shadows of the shore.

Simmonds reported himself ready. I showed him

a star to keep ahead of him as he tramped across the sand-dunes, and told him that if I heard three guns fired I should know he had been fetched on board the *Apollo* or *Harold*.

" Don't make a sound paddling ashore. Everything depends on you—good luck to you."

He had his bundle of Arab clothes under his arm, climbed down into the little native boat, and shoved off, but had to free her from some of the fishing-net rope and floats which clung to her before he could paddle away. In half a minute he had vanished in the dark, and we could only hear a faint sound of his paddles.

Just as I had suggested to Smedley that we might now clear away those fishing-nets, rifle firing suddenly broke out, not from where the shore lay. The stabs of rifle flame came from right astern, evidently from boats between us and the mouth of the creek. They came from far off, and though it was horribly unpleasant to think that boats could get there without being seen, I knew that the noise they made would prevent their hearing any sound of Simmonds's paddles.

I felt very nervous—we all were. I could hear my heart thumping, and realized that these boats could creep up within twenty yards of the dhow before we could see them. Little enough time that would give us, and nothing could we do but peer through the darkness, listening for the sound of paddles, and wait.

I heard Jerry whining for somebody to give him a rifle " or something ". I had him carried to the poop, near the Maxim; somebody gave him a rifle, and he whined that he didn't want his throat cut.

I came across Scraggs. He had freed his left arm from the bandages and held the Mauser pistol in his left hand; his right gripped a cutlass.

For half an hour—I imagine for half an hour, though it seemed ages—we waited like this. Every now and again one or other of us thought we could see the darker shadow of a boat, but we never saw anything close enough to fire at; nor would I let the men shoot, for fear of giving away the dhow's exact position. Rifle firing went on almost continuously, not drawing nearer, but coming now from almost every quarter. It seemed as though the rifle flashes nearly made a ring round us.

Every now and again the Afghans in the boats started the most nerve-racking yells, as though they braced themselves to dash at us. If many of them did so, I knew we couldn't keep them away—the business would be quickly over.

The shore breeze still blew steadily, and that *saved* us.

With the tide ebbing strongly the dhow should have swung with her stern *towards* the mouth of the creek, and the breeze should have blown *across* her deck, blowing in our faces when we peered over the starboard side towards the village. But now it struck me that it blew fore and aft *along* her deck, and that our bows must be pointing somewhere in the direction of the village or mud fort. The rifle flashes ahead seemed more numerous and nearer.

Then a twinkle of light shone out right ahead and moved quickly, shutting off for a moment and then shining again, as though someone carried it through

a group of men or behind trees. I knew that it came from the shore; it stopped moving; someone waved it backwards and forwards; then it disappeared.

As it waved, triumphant yells came from out of the dark.

Smedley found me. "Look, sir! Look at the water!"

I peered down over the side.

"That's no tide, sir! We're moving through it. That lantern was on shore, nearer than it oughter be."

Looking down, I could just see the little eddies drifting along the side—well, the tide would account for them. But while I looked they ceased. Then they started again, and just as they started I felt a "pull" on the dhow.

Something must have happened to our anchor hawser. I thought of those fishing-nets, and Smedley and I rushed to the bows. Smedley threw himself down and leant over.

"We're being dragged ashore, sir! Pay out the hawser, pay out the hawser!"

I didn't ask him what had happened, but dashed for the riding bitts, and threw off the coil of hawser and began to pay it out, Brown helping me, breathing hard. Smedley disappeared along the deck.

Hard as Brown and I hauled and heaved at that coil of huge hawser and passed it over the bows, I felt that the dhow was still being dragged towards the shore. I heard Smedley jump into the cutter, and come on board again, almost shrieking for the axe; he found it and came flying for'ard.

"Hold on to it, sir; hold it over the bitts," he cried,

and commenced hacking and chopping desperately. It was as thick as my arm, but one strand parted—then another. He was half-way through it when he struck the wooden bitts, and the head of the axe came off the shaft and flew overboard. We got out our knives and hacked despairingly—their knife-blades were blunt and scarcely cut through the fibre. Thank goodness I always kept mine sharp, and I managed to get through another strand. Only three more held us, and we sawed like madmen, getting in each other's way, and each time the people on shore gave a pull we could feel the jerk on those awful strands.

Then the men aft began shouting, letting off their rifles and yelling that boats were coming at us.

I pushed my knife to Brown and left him cutting frantically, snatched up my rifle, and jumped aft. Smedley came too.

A boat knocked up against the cutter lying alongside the starboard side; four or five men tried to scramble across her, and more yells came from the other side. I shouted to Smedley to look to the port side and fired down into the cutter. Rifles fired from the poop, rifles fired behind me.

Two men began scrambling out of the cutter. I banged one on the head with my rifle butt, and he dropped. I tried to swing my rifle on the other's head, but had not Scraggs pressed the Mauser pistol in his face and fired, he would have knifed me.

I heard Brown call, "Carried away, sir!" and heard the end of the hawser splash in the water; the yelling from shore stopped and then burst out again; the Maxim commenced firing; by the light it gave I saw

Smedley and Wilkins being pressed back from the port side as half a dozen men fought their way over the dhow's gunwale. I dashed across, O'Leary and Scraggs with me. Brown came rushing aft, and I don't remember exactly what happened, but found myself slashing at an Afghan with my cutlass. He disappeared, and another came at me with a long knife. I grabbed at his wrist, pressing it back, and struck him in the face with the cutlass hilt, wrapped my arms round him, tripped him against the low gunwale, and he fell—or I threw him—overboard. I saw O'Leary drive a man for'ard and cut him down with his cutlass; the Maxim ceased firing, and then it was over. Smedley came up breathing hard, and we listened to the angry shouting and yelling coming from the shore. Thank heaven! it sounded much farther away than it had before Brown cut through the hawser.

"We'd 'ave been 'auled ashore in another five minutes, sir," Smedley panted.

Well, we had not, but no thanks to me. I cursed myself again for not seeing through their trick of laying out those nets where the tide would take them across our bows, and for being such a blind ass as to suspect nothing when they did foul the hawser. However, we had escaped—thanks to that shore breeze and Smedley—and soon drifted with the tide and breeze down towards the mouth of the creek and the opposite shore of the khor.

We let her drift until we thought the dhow far enough away from the village, and then anchored with her second grapnel anchor. No firing came from anywhere and scarcely a sound from the shore. Then I

had time to find out what had happened to the others. Smedley had a deep gash across his forehead and kept wiping away the blood with the back of his hand; Scraggs leant up against the mast holding his left shoulder. " Burst the wound open, sir; 'twill be all right."

" You saved me from a nasty jab," I told him.

" Come in pretty 'andy, that Mauser pistol did, sir," he answered quietly.

Wilkins we found lying on the deck, breathing but unconscious; Reuben squatted by his Maxim, untouched; O'Leary and Brown had come through the scrap without a scratch; and Jerry, still sitting on the poop, called out cheerfully, for the first time in his life: " I done in two of 'em savidges, sir. I did 'em in, I did—I with my legs and all."

Three dead Afghans lay on the deck, and we threw the bodies overboard; Adolphus we could not find; no one had seen him all through the night.

" 'Ow about a tot of that there rum, sir?" Smedley suggested.

We had a tot and felt better.

" A pretty narrow squeak that was," Smedley said, wiping his forehead again. " I 'opes Simmonds 'ave got across to the sea and finds the *'Pollo* or the *'Arold*. I don't much 'anker arter another night's rough and tumble, sir; that I don't."

" You said they would attack us—you and O'Leary. I was wrong," I told them; but Smedley shook his head.

" Only three of them there boats came at us, sir; more than like as 'ow those chaps ashore *dragged* us

into *them*; they 'appened to find us almost on top of 'em in the dark, lost their 'eads, and come for us."

I know what he meant, and expect that he was right. If they had intended to board the dhow, twenty boat-loads would have attacked. It was plain as a pikestaff that they hoped to drag the dhow ashore till she stuck in the mud, and to shoot us down when daylight came. Someone, probably one of the dhow's crew, must have swum off or hauled himself along the fishing-net, from float to float, until it brought him to where it fouled the dhow's hawser. If he had been seen, his head would have looked just like a float and would have been unnoticed, and while he lashed the net rope to the hawser and cut through the hawser *beyond* it—half an hour's job—those chaps had fired their rifles and yelled at us from *astern* to distract our attention. A cunning scheme it was, and I bet that the nakhoda of the dhow invented it and thought that he had made sure of his dhow. Thank God! his scheme had failed, but only just failed.

We sat together on the after hatch, dead tired, O'Leary, Reuben, and Jerry pleased with themselves and the night's work, Smedley and I wondering if we could get through another.

I looked ashore and saw pale-yellow streaks shooting up behind the dark blurred shadows of the shore—dawn was coming, and never had I longed for it so fervently. In a quarter of an hour it was light enough to see from one end of the dhow to the other. Her deck and gunwales were splashed with dark patches of blood.

Smedley's singlet and shorts were soaked in blood

from that gash across his forehead, and blood still trickled from Scraggs's reopened wound. I went across to where Wilkins lay and turned him over. His face was covered with blood and his hair matted with it, but, to my intense relief, as I moved him he raised himself on his hands, looked at me stupidly, and tried to wipe the blood out of his eyes. He had a clean cut across the top of his head, and we dressed it, gave him some cocoa, and laid him down again. "We've driven them off; we're quite snug now," I told him, but he only muttered something, vomited up the cocoa, and went to sleep again. By the time I had dressed Smedley's and Scraggs's wounds as best I could—for the little first-aid bag held very few dressings—it was broad daylight. Not a sound came from the shore, and though I searched among the mud huts of the village and under the palm trees with my telescope, not a soul could I see. The only thing that moved was the Wali's little Persian flag at one corner of his mud fort.

I heard the men laughing—it seemed an extraordinary sound at the moment, considering what they had been through—and turning round saw one of the boards of the fore hatch raised, and from under it Adolphus looked at us with wild, frightened eyes.

So *that* was where the poor wretch had hidden himself.

CHAPTER V

The "Harold" comes Along

Written by Lieutenant-Commander the Honourable James Crawford, R.N.

Mine isn't exactly a bed of roses on board the *Harold*. Here am I, a delicate little chap who doesn't like fussing or being fussed, trembles all over when he's bullied, and wants to be let alone while he jogs along through this sinful life. Instead of which, I don't get one minute's peace. It started again when the very smart and precise Gunner—my Second-in-Command—and I had finished our breakfast of tinned sausages and the bundari's vile coffee. I tell him that my health won't stand fussing, but he doesn't care one straw, and "went for" me again.

"Look here, sir, that beard of yours is getting rather scraggly—a little too scraggly, I call it."

"It's a jolly handsome beard; it's a better beard than yours, Gunner; it's artistic," I told him.

"Well, you can't see where it begins, and you can't see where it ends—if you call that artistic. And it's got a bit of sausage and some coffee in it now. If you like to call that artistic, I don't."

I tried to get Malony to protect me; Malony, the bearded ruffian who stood at the wheel alongside us,

and steered the *Harold* as she crawled along the Persian coast, three miles off.

"It seems to 'ave got in the way of your breakfast, sir, anyway," was the only help I would get from him —the insubordinate hound; so I turned appealingly to the chaukra—my little bantam-cock of an Indian boy from Baroda, my maid-of-all-work, butler, valet, barmaid, and what not—who was clearing the debris from the breakfast-table and shaking the cloth over the side.

"What's your unbiassed opinion, Alexander the Great?"

"No look burra[1] Sahib," he said gravely, cocking his head on one side and folding up the cloth.

"You young scoundrel," I cooed at him, as he stood there in his immaculate white turban, long white coat, and Jodpur breeches—how he kept them clean, I never knew. "I wish I'd never set eyes on you—you Indian Nabob, you bloodthirsty Rajah, you terror of my life."

"No look burra Sahib," he repeated solemnly; so for peace sake I sent him to borrow a pair of scissors from the corporal of marines, leant back in my deck chair, smoked my pipe, stuck my bare feet on the rails, twiddled my toes to give me something else to look at than the beastly glaring sea, and told Alexander the Great to give me a clip, here and there, where he thought it wanted it most.

"Not so pointed as the Gunner's and not so bushy as Malony's," I explained. "Betwixt and between—just Bond Street fashion."

[1] burra = high-class.

He began sawing away at one side, pulling most of the hairs out by the roots, when I heard the wireless down below cracking, and presently Bostock, our ginger-headed signalman, poked his nose up the ladder with a signal pad.

" Don't disturb me in my toilet; get the Gunner to read it."

" From the *Apollo*, sir."

" ' *Apollo* to *Harold*—am returning to Muscat to meet Commander-in-Chief; proceed down coast to visit cutters off Sirik and Bungi.' "

" Tell him to keep his hair on," I replied. With Alexander the Great tugging mine *off*, I thought that a jolly appropriate remark.

The Gunner wrote down: " *Harold* to *Apollo*—your signal received; am proceeding immediately towards Sirik and Bungi."

" We'll get there by daylight to-morrow, sir," he called, and added: " Intend being off Sirik at daybreak to-morrow."

I shut my eyes again as Alexander the Great commenced trimming the other side; down below, Bostock began making nasty noises with his wireless.

" What's the Flagship coming here for, sir?" the Gunner asked.

" Ordinary spring cruise—nice fine weather—not too hot for the Old Man; he'll have a look round, wonder why we grumble at the climate, and go back again," and I grinned (when Alexander the Great let me) when I thought of the *Apollo* dashing off to meet him. It was just what that worm of a Skipper would do; he'd find some excuse or other to buzz round the

Commander-in-Chief—like a fly round jam. I could picture him with his "Yes, sir; no, sir; of course, sir; not at all, sir"—his little beard twitching all the time—and the Admiral swallowing his drivel—or trying to do so—and asking him to dinner. He would go toadying to the Flag Captain and put his head into the Secretary's office, with "Good morning, Mr. Secretary; all the troubles of the station on your shoulders—eh—as usual? Come over and have lunch with me; I'll show you round Muscat afterwards." I could just imagine the polite Secretary luring him into the ward-room and losing him.

He'd bubble over to everybody with tips for stopping this gun-running business — tips he'd mugged up from dear old Sammy Dodington—and—well, I'd only met the fellow once—he'd fawned on me, because of my pater—and how much peaceful, holy enjoyment it would give me to kick him round his own quarter-deck.

"Have you completed the scheme of redecoration, Alexander?" I asked, as that gentleman ceased pulling hairs out.

"Very nice! Master look burra Sahib," he said, hurriedly retreating down the ladder to fetch a broom and sweep up the little deck-house space, round the wheel, where the Gunner and myself lived.

"Please, will that do?" I asked the Gunner, who only grinned triumphantly, the savage; while Malony, the insubordinate cut-throat, muttered, "I can't see no more sausage, anyway;" and so I hoped that I had done my best to make everyone happy.

This wireless business is all jolly well in its way and

comes in handy at times, but I like to jog along on my own, and I don't like getting a beastly signal from a hundred miles away, ordering me to do something I particularly don't want to do. One can't get into the dinghy, pull across, and explain; one has to obey and grumble afterwards.

It wasn't my job to look after " Our Willie's " cutters; it was his; and I don't suppose for a moment that the Commander-in-Chief wanted to see him at Muscat any more than he wanted to see me, and he hated to see me on his lovely quarterdeck—I wasn't smart enough to look at.

However, I had to leave my own fifty-mile stretch of the coast and have a look at those two cutters.

" We'll just have a look at Harrison's cutter, then go on to Bungi," I told the Gunner. " There's a young Sub down there learning the business. We'll tuck him up and make him comfortable; kiss him for his mother and toddle along back to Sirik. We'll get back there by the dinner-hour, anchor the bus close in, land on the beach, and have a game of football with the cutter's crew. The men can take their supper with them."

" It'll do them good, sir; they haven't been out of the ship for six weeks."

I meant to take ashore the two pairs of gloves hanging in my dog's hole behind the wheel. I'd get Peter Harrison to stick them on, and we'd have a few rounds. He was two sizes too tall for me, but I hadn't been behind the door when arms were served out, so had got an extra long pair to make up for it.

When we'd banged ourselves about enough, we'd have a smoke and let the other chaps have the gloves.

Malony was my star-turn prize-fighter. "Who's down in that Sirik cutter?" I asked him. "Anyone who'd give you a hammering with the gloves?"

He knew of a chap in that boat's crew who was a bit of a bruiser—a seaman named Roberts—and if he lost his temper as quickly as Malony generally lost his, I looked forward to quite a pleasant little picnic.

However, when we did make Sirik creek at daylight next morning, not the sign of a boat could we see. "He's inside, hobnobbing with the Wali," I thought; pushed ashore till we hadn't much water under us, and was just going to get out the dinghy and send a man up the creek, or go up myself to stretch my muscles, when my chaps caught sight of a fellow waving furiously on the beach a quarter of a mile to the left of the creek.

"It's the cutter's signalman," Bostock called out. "I knows 'is red face; 'e's signalling to be took off.

"I knows 'im," he explained to the excited crew as they got out the dinghy. "Bet me five bob, 'e did, that the '*Arold* didn't catch no blooming dhow—and ain't paid up. 'E can't grow no beard, neither. I knows 'im."

I pulled ashore myself. The chap waded out and, on the way back, told me the yarn you know; told me as much as he knew, and that there'd been a thundering lot of firing after he had left the dhow, but nothing since daylight—not a sound.

I pulled back fast enough and, whether Harrison and his little lot were still alive or not, quickly fixed up my little picnic.

The signalman wanted me to fire three rounds from the three-pounder as a signal that he'd been taken off, so I cocked her up at about 6500 yards range, and pushed off three shells over the sandhills towards Sirik. They weren't likely to go near Harrison's dhow; but they might splash in the khor and buck him up when he saw them, and give the chaps ashore something to think about. Of course I could not send the signalman back again.

The lascar firemen shoved on the coal like the very dickens, and we buzzed away to Bungi with steam blowing off. Luckily the *Apollo's* second cutter lay off Bungi and not round the corner behind Kuh-i-Mubarak, five miles farther away, the usual place to find her; so that in less than two hours I was steaming back again, nearly swamping the cutter towing astern, even when I eased to seven knots and then to five.

The silly young ass of a Sub sitting in the stern, there, looked like a picture in a fashion paper, and of course that bully the Gunner went for me again. I knew he would, directly I saw him.

" Now, there's a real smart-looking officer for you, sir," he began, as we towed him along. " He's got a collar *and* a black silk navy tie; he's a credit to the Navy, he is, sir."

" Silly young fool; he'll learn some day," I said. " I wouldn't be seen dead in a soft collar and a black silk tie. Would you like to see me dead in a soft collar, Gunner? Don't bully me; I did get my beard trimmed yesterday."

The Gunner only grunted: " I suppose you are going

up to Sirik, sir, and I suppose I'm to be left on board —as usual."

"You've guessed right the very first time," and I clapped him on the shoulder. "If you'll be kind to me sometimes, you shall go for the *next* picnic."

"You've said that for the last six months," the Gunner growled, as he went away to get the men and their gear ready for landing.

I knew that; but if anybody's head has to get in a pickle on shore, that's mine; and if one of us has to keep his head cool on board and look after the old tub, that's his. Besides the Gunner and myself, we had ten white chaps in the *Harold*, seven seamen and three marines. I intended to leave the Gunner and the three seamen and to land with the other seven and the Sub's nine. With Harrison's signalman that brought our numbers up to nineteen—quite a respectable army. The Sub, with five of his boat's crew, had to spread out and advance along one side of the creek, while I, with eight, advanced along the other side, the inland side. That would leave four men in the cutter—the Petty Officer, two men to pull, and one to work her Maxim. I would give him four lascar firemen who could pull oars, and the other four lascars should bring along one of the *Harold's* Maxims with my party. I had had a trestle affair made for it at Karachi on purpose for little shows like this, and they could carry it easily. They had done so already several times.

With the cutter and her Maxim paddling up the creek between our two parties on either bank, we ought to have no difficulty in getting through to Harrison unless the Afghans were very numerous.

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I TOLD HIM THIS WAS *MY* SHOW

"Prepare yourself for deadly combat," I ordered Alexander the Great, "and come ashore to protect me." He came back with the long butcher's knife stuck through his girdle, a haversack slung over his shoulder for my pipe, tobacco-pouch, and matches, and a couple of water-bottles dangling from a leather strap—the fiercest young bantam in the world—his eyes blazing with excitement.

"Master have old helmet?" he asked, handing me something which once had been, I believe, a helmet. I clapped it on my head.

Then he very gravely brought along the belt with my revolver and cutlass, buckled it round me, slung my field-glasses round my neck, and stepped back to see if I looked pretty.

"Master burra Sahib!" he said, his eyes glowing. He fetched my pipe, filled my tobacco-pouch, found a couple of boxes of matches, and stuffed them into his haversack. I knew that, whatever was going to happen in the next couple of hours, I should only have to put my hand out behind me, say nothing, and my filled pipe and a box of matches would be pushed into it.

Well, there was no accounting for things; but I do know that if we did have a rough and tumble ashore I'd as soon have that little fire-eater of a lad behind me, with his big butcher's knife, as many a chap twice his size.

I sent for the young dandy of a Sub and explained exactly what we had to do. He seemed far too excited to take in much of it. He pulled me and my seven men ashore and went back to the *Harold* for the lascars and their Maxim. A couple of chaps sneaking

about near the creek let off their bunduks at us, but scurried off out of sight, and when the lascars and the Maxim came ashore and the Sub had marshalled his army on the other bank, we began to advance along the creek exactly as I had arranged.

Before we lost sight of the *Harold* she began semaphoring, and Harrison's signalman, who came with my party, read the message.

" Signal from *Harold*, sir. ' *Persepolis* five miles away—approaching from north—flying flag at main.' "

Flying a flag at the main, was she? Well, I was blowed; that meant that my fat old friend the Derya Begi had torn himself away from his cosy palace at Bushire and was on board her. When he sighted the *Harold*, he'd come along, find out all about our picnic, and want to be mixed up in it—want me to wait for him to get his eighteen stone of carcass ashore.

So I hurried along a bit faster to get out of sight of the *Harold* and any more signals. I knew every inch of the creek and the khor beyond, and I knew that if old Peter Harrison was still alive in his dhow in the middle of that khor, if his maxim didn't jam and he had ammunition, he could smoke his pipe in comfort, Afghans or no Afghans, during daylight hours.

As we had come across nobody but those two skulkers before we landed, I did not expect to find any more until we came to an unpleasant bend in the creek, half-way along it; so when we got within three hundred yards or so of its jumble of sandhills I pumped half a belt of Maxim into the camel-thorn scrub and, getting no reply, walked on, knowing perfectly well that no Afghans could be there.

It was all plain sailing after this, and very shortly afterwards I heard the sound of Harrison's Maxim far ahead, so knew that he and his little lot had not been scuppered—not yet, at any rate.

Then a couple of shots came from beyond the opposite bank. I heard shouting, and as I scrambled to the top of a sandhill and looked across I saw that confounded young Sub and his five men chasing a couple of Afghans who were legging it for all they were worth. His men kept stopping to fire at them, but the Sub, with his revolver in his hand, went after them like a terrier after a couple of rats.

I roared to him to come back, but even my little dove-like voice didn't stop him. He had lost his head completely. When next I caught sight of him he had gained on the two chaps, his men a hundred yards astern. I saw the two take cover behind some scrub, and then I suppose they thought they'd have one last go at a Christian, and they dashed back at him.

His men could not fire for fear of hitting him, and though mine fired, their bullets never went near the Afghans. I thought that the Sub's number was " up " and that I should have the job of writing home to his mother, when I saw him stop, plant his feet firmly in the sand, and fire his pistol. He fired once; they were not twenty yards from him; he fired a second time; they still came on; and then he fired a third time, and the leading chap sprawled forwards. He fired a fourth round; but the other chap thought better of it, bolted, apparently untouched, and disappeared very quickly among the sand-dunes.

Although I should not have to write that letter—not

yet awhile—I was furious, halted everybody, and sent for the young gentleman, who with all his men was now close to the man he'd killed.

He came across, flushed with excitement, and I told him off " proper "—as I heard the corporal of marines tell his pals afterwards.

I told him that this was *my* show, and it had to be done as I wanted it done; I didn't want him and his men dashing ahead out of line, and I didn't want him showing off with his pistol. If he didn't carry out my orders, he could go back to the cutter and stay there. " We ain't a lot of blooming greyhounds, you young ass," I finished up with, and sent him back to his men with a very considerable flea in his ear, trying to look sorry but not making much of a hand at that.

I've had twenty little scraps like this one, on both sides of the Gulf, with every rotten tribe thereabouts, and if I want trouble I know exactly how to find it.

However, as nothing more happened after all this yelling and shooting, I knew that if there was any considerable number of Afghans in the neighbourhood they'd got some other job at present. So we pushed on again, and in a quarter of a mile I could see the top of the Wali's mud fort over the palm trees. At the next ridge the whole khor lay beyond, opening out in front of us, and there was old Peter's dhow with the cutter towing her towards the creek and a native boat coming along after her from Sirik. I watched the boat catch her up and go alongside, and then some of my chaps on either bank saw an Afghan wading across the creek a couple of hundred yards ahead of us—the chap that the Sub did *not* hit, I expect. He dashed away towards

the edge of the khor, towards Sirik, and as the ground hadn't a bush or a fold to conceal him I let my chaps fire a few rounds at him to hurry him along. It would give me an excuse for making them clean their rifles when we got aboard again! In ten minutes we had reached the edge of the khor on each side of the creek, and Peter hailed me from the dhow that the Afghans had all cleared away from Sirik.

I went on board.

" They've all cleared out. The Wali's come off to tell me," Harrison grinned, " and we've got a thousand rifles on board here. Had any trouble? I heard your Maxim, but didn't know until I spotted you if it was the *Apollo* or your lot coming along."

" That young Sub of yours played the fool," I told him, " nothing else. I hurried up because the *Persepolis* is coming in, and the old Derya Begi might have spoilt the show."

Then I saw the Wali standing, bowing and scraping, rubbing his hands and touching his forehead—he knew me perfectly well, the old hypocrite—and began jabbering.

" Make plenty fight! Fire plenty from fort! Afghans very frightened; go back hills with camels," and he pointed a lean finger inland, where we could see a cloud of dust half-way to the hills. " Men of Sirik good—bunduks all safe in dhow—no bunduk in Sirik. Wali happy man—very happy man." Harrison's interpreter explained when we at last stopped his babbling. Both Harrison and myself guessed that he'd seen the masts of the *Persepolis* from the top of his fort—her one thin funnel and two masts—and had told the

Afghans; but we didn't quite know why they should have cleared out so hurriedly. If he could only make us believe that he had *not* seen the ship, he could pitch a fine yarn when the Derya Begi sent for him.

Harrison told me about his prisoner, and we tried to make the Wali say who he was, but he only kept on repeating: " Poor fish merchant from Muscat. Afghans take poor fish merchant away with them."

You could see that he lied, and he looked so frightened, and so did the interpreter, when we questioned them, that we knew that they did know who he was and that he must be someone of importance.

One thing the old villain had done: he'd brought along half a dozen tins of fresh water, and Harrison and his fellows needed it badly.

We sent him ashore, but not before he had pleaded: " When see great Derya Begi, tell Derya Begi, Wali of Sirik very good man, very brave man, make Afghans send off rifles, drive Afghans back to hills. Derya Begi very pleased."

I sent Harrison's three wounded men to the *Harold* in the Sub's cutter for the Gunner to dress their wounds again and make them comfortable. Harrison had had another man knocked out during the night for a few hours, but he seemed all right again now, with a lump on his forehead the size of an orange and the most beautiful pair of black eyes.

They had stowed the poor chap who had been killed down below in the hold—Roberts, the able seaman who was to have battered that insubordinate cut-throat Malony, if we'd had the other kind of picnic.

We arranged for both cutters to tow the dhow out

through the creek in about an hour, when the tide began to ebb, and then Alexander the Great brought me my pipe, and Harrison and I yarned.

" Your old dhow looks more untidy than the *Harold*; we don't have bloodstains over everything," I said, as we watched his men sitting on the hatch-cover telling a lot of mine, who had come aboard to look round, all about yesterday's and last night's scrapping.

While we waited for the tide to turn and for the Sub to come back in his cutter, Harrison and I discussed our plans.

I wanted to get back to my fifty miles of coast, Lingah way, as soon as possible; and if the Gunner thought he could look after the three wounded on board the *Harold*, I would lend Harrison some of my chaps to fill his boat and get along back. If the Gunner didn't like tackling the job, I should have to take them across to Hume, the Staff-Surgeon in the *Intrepid* at Muscat. With the Commander-in-Chief there, I did not want to shove my nose in, if I could possibly keep it out.

I suppose that if I had to return to Muscat I ought to tow the dhow across to be condemned legally; but the men had already asked that we should sink her in deep water, out at sea, and bury Roberts among those thousand rifles. They thought that the poor chap would lie there more " easy-like ". Perhaps he would!

We had just decided to do this as soon as we had towed her out through the creek, when into the khor came a white man-of-war boat with the Persian ensign flying astern and the blue green and gold flag of the Governor of the Gulf Coast in the bows. In the stern-sheets we saw the immense shape of the Derya Begi

himself. He is said to have been, when a young man, an interpreter on board a British gunboat in the Gulf.

The boat ran alongside as Harrison called his men to attention, and he and I saluted him. He touched his Persian fez and looked up at us cheerily, calling out: " More rifles, Mr. Jimmy, more rifles?"

I asked him if we could do anything for him, and he beckoned with one fat finger for us both to climb down alongside him.

He wanted to hear all about the scrapping, and while we told him, Harrison happened to mention his prisoner and his exchange for the rifles already taken ashore.

The Derya Begi pricked up his ears at this. " Who was he? Did we know him?" and his eyes narrowed as he sat up, his huge, unwieldy body surprisingly alert.

Harrison couldn't give much of a description; his dress might have described any petty chieftain, and the Derya Begi had let himself flop down in the stern-sheets again when Harrison, as an afterthought, added: " He did have a huge scar on the left side of his face and neck—looked as though his chin had been shot away years ago."

The Derya Begi stiffened as he heard this; he seemed a different man; his fat hands gripped the gunwales on either side fiercely, and the cheery smile on his face changed to an expression of intense hatred—a most unpleasant sight.

He shook his fist at the cloud of dust which we could still see inland towards the hills, and he cursed till he nearly choked.

" A friend of yours, sir?" I asked him, laughing.

" A friend of mine!" he hissed. " I had him on board the *Persepolis* for three months last year, kept him locked up; he gave me the slip. I wish I'd torn his liver out. I'll do it next time I get the chance."

He was most extraordinarily excited and wanted to dash off and see the Wali at once; so Harrison and I climbed on board the dhow again, and he pulled ashore, scarcely returning our salutes.

I had heard all about this Baluchi chief whom the Derya Begi had lured on board his ship last year—the most violent, unscrupulous cut-throat in the whole country.

" Seems pretty excited," Harrison said. " I wonder who that chap was."

" Who was he? Why! He was the man who's causing all the trouble down this end of Persia. It was Mir Barkhat Khan himself."

CHAPTER VI

The "Harold" strikes a Gale

Written by Lieutenant-Commander the Honourable James Crawford, R.N.

"Who's Mir Barkhat Khan?" Harrison asked.

Fancy old Peter not knowing that pleasant fellow—not knowing him after eighteen months in the Gulf!

"Ask your tame fire-eater," I suggested, pointing to his miserable, frightened interpreter, who only showed the whites of his eyes and stammered: "I no know. Firewood merchant from Muscat!"

The poor wretch couldn't even remember the lie he and the Wali had told.

"Keep it up, brave fellow!" I laughed. "We always buy our firewood from him—when we're at Muscat; don't we, Alexander the Great?"

But that little tyrant, busy unbuckling my sword and revolver belt, only looked at me, puzzled that one so mighty as "Master" should not always speak the truth, and answered: "Master say so!"

Good little chap! I'd never known him tell me a lie, and he never did tell me a lie. His old mother in Baroda, to whom he sent all, or nearly all, the wages I gave him, must have been "a bit of a dear", to bring him up so bravely.

While we waited for the tide and for the Sub to bring the cutter back from the *Harold*, I told Harrison all I knew about his prisoner.

He had been the Governor—the Sirdar—of the whole of the country behind the special hundred miles of coast he and I and the Sub were watching, and an out-and-out violent and unscrupulous Governor at that. The taxes he did collect ought to have found their way, most of them, into the Derya Begi's ample pockets, and they didn't. So the fat old gentleman came along from Bushire, managed to lure him down to the coast and on board the *Persepolis*, where he kept him a prisoner. He escaped after three months, and when he returned to this coast found another Governor in his place. This made him pretty sick of life, so he gathered all the ruffians from the villages near the sea, took them along with him behind the hills, and made a comfortable living by fleecing the Ghilzai gun-running caravans as they passed. In return for the money they paid him, he raided villages whose Walis refused to let dhows land rifles in their creeks or gave warning whenever they suspected that any intended to do so. Not only had he become the terror of that whole coast, but he had gained so much influence among the turbulent Baluchi chiefs of the hills that at a word from him they were always ready to join forces and help him in a raid. The Persian Government was far away; Mir Barkhat Khan was very close at hand, and the Derya Begi's influence did not reach beyond the salt-caked plains which bordered the sea.

One could not help feeling sorry for our old friend the Wali of Sirik; he really was between the devil of

Mir Barkhat Khan and the deep sea of the Derya Begi and ourselves; so were all the other coast Walis. Of course, when I had told him all this, Harrison wished that he had not given him up, and that he had allowed the Afghans to carry off those two hundred rifles. But that was nonsense! "My dear chap!" I told him, "you didn't know the chap you caught, and you wouldn't have handed him over to our fat friend even if you did. I'd sooner turn the D.B. over to Barkhat Khan, than the B.K. to the Derya Begi; he'd have a more pleasant death."

While we argued about it the Derya Begi came back from Sirik and stopped alongside. He had quite recovered his good temper, and wanted us both to come aboard the *Persepolis* and have coffee. He told us that the raiders had taken away most of the Wali's sheep and goats (he seemed vastly amused at this); he never referred to his enemy, and pointing one fat hand at the great masses of clouds spreading from the south east, pulled out through the creek.

Harrison recognized, lying on the seat beside him, a large silver box studded with stones which looked like sapphires and emeralds. He told me that he had often seen it, and that it had been the Wali's most precious possession—the box in which he kept all his papers, pen, and ink-block; and we could picture the old gentleman eyeing it covetously, and the wretched chap imploring him to take it. After him followed those two boatloads of Persian soldiery, and as they passed the dhow we saw a dozen or more sheep and goats huddled among them; so what the Afghans hadn't taken, these had. Poor old Wali!

That miserable sinner came along presently to beg us to put in a good word for him. He threw himself at our feet, beat the deck with his hands, pretended (though not hard enough really to hurt himself) to pull out the hairs of his beard, and whined that we were his only true friends. " Me help drive off Afghans, now we make Derya Begi's face to smile on him," or words to that effect.

It disgusted us to see a human being so abject, and when we saw the Sub coming back in his cutter we bundled him away before he had told us half the blessings in store for us.

The sooner we towed the dhow out, sank her, and buried Harrison's seaman, Roberts, the better; this breeze and those clouds down over the land meant a south-east gale—what they call a *kaus*. It would whip up a nasty sea in a brace of shakes, and probably would last for three days.

So we wasted no more time, and towed her out through the creek, having a bit of a wrestling match whenever the breeze caught her at the various bends, and found the sea outside already so unpleasant that we had much difficulty in getting her through it and making her fast astern of the *Harold*.

I went on board the *Harold*, and while Harrison's chaps chipped away at the dhow's bottom boards with their boat axes and the two cutters hung on, I towed them all out beyond the fifteen-fathom line.

" Can't keep those poor fellows on board here, sir; they're beyond me, their wounds are," the Gunner had reported, and that meant that we should have to steam across to Muscat and hand them over to Hume,

the *Apollo's* Staff Surgeon. With this *kaus* coming along I guessed what a nice little crossing lay before us, and that the sooner I shoved off the better for the wounded men and ourselves. You try and sink an old dhow with nothing but an axe or two, and see how long it takes you, even if she has a thousand rifles on board and a few tons of sand ballast. Before Harrison shouted that water was pouring in through three holes, the old *Persepolis* had hoisted in all her boats, weighed, and was already hull down to the north'ard.

I thought that dhow would never sink; she knew she was doomed and clung to life, wallowing heavily from side to side in the short seas, but settling down so slowly that at last I cast her off. Harrison told me that Roberts had been laid right aft, so when her bows lifted I put a few three-pounder shells through them. These tore out some planks below the water-line, and she began to scuttle by the head, and after another quarter of an hour she gave one feeble lurch and slid underneath with Roberts and his thousand rifles. Many of us would not have an end so fitting—lying there in fifteen fathoms.

We had our ensigns half-masted, and stood at attention while Harrison tried to read the burial service from his prayer-book; but the wind and the sea drowned his words. We waited a few moments, then hoisted the colours. Night was coming on, the whole sky gloomy, with grey clouds everywhere; the moist wind was musty with spray and gathered strength every minute. Dull grey seas swept up the coast from the direction of Bungi. I hadn't the least intention of towing the Sub's cutter down there. He would

have to stay with Harrison until this beastly *kaus* had blown itself out, and then sail down.

I gave Harrison three of my chaps to make up his crew—two marines and a seaman—saw the two cutters pull in to comparatively smooth water near the blurred shore-line, battened down my old bus, double lashed everything movable on deck, and then began pitching and rolling and playing the fool on my way to Muscat.

The *Harold* is a little daisy in smooth water and safe enough in a seaway, but " lively " scarcely describes her. Malony generally has plenty of thoroughly descriptive adjectives for most things, but when I suggested to him, as he hung on to the wheel, turning and twisting it to keep her bows on her course, that she was " lively ", all he could say was " Not 'arf!"

All that night she tried to chuck her funnel and masts out of her; we had to ease her to five knots; we simply crawled along. In the morning watch she managed to carry away her wireless fore top-mast, and everyone had to turn out while we kept her head to the seas and hauled the wreckage of it and Bostock's confounded wireless aerials out of the water.

" Lucky they didn't get round the screw!" the Gunner shouted at me cheerily when, wet through, we managed at last to disentangle ourselves in the pitch darkness and secure them on board.

He didn't mention that if I hadn't been a blooming idiot I should have taken them down before we started.

I should also have taken off the awnings because, as we rolled, with the seas and wind on our starboard beam, some of the fierce gusts bellowed them out and

pressed the old *Harold* over till her lee gunwale dipped under water. It blew so hard just before dawn, and she lurched once or twice so heavily, that I had to bring her up into the gale and heave to, keeping the engines moving ahead only fast enough to give her steerage way. She then rode more easily, and I hoped that those wounded chaps stowed away down below were having a less horrible time of it.

The Gunner and I hung on to the rails round the wheel and the top of our little deck-house, and he had just yelled in my ear, "The harder it blows the shorter it lasts, this time of year!" when I felt a nudge in the back, and there was Alexander the Great, bare-headed, with a jug of hot cocoa and a couple of mugs. How he had managed to boil any water, I don't know, because the native bundaris lay coiled up in a heap behind their cook-house, half dead with fright and sea-sickness, and nothing on heaven or earth would make them stir.

Great little chap!

When daylight came it didn't make things look any the more pleasant. A *kaus* is not one of those bracing, banging gales when you muffle yourself up, stick on a sou'wester, your sea-boots and an oilskin, hang on by your eyelashes, sing out "Ho! ho!" or "Ha! ha!" whichever seems more appropriate, and wonder why everybody doesn't come to sea. A *kaus* is a hot, steamy, muggy, rotten kind of a gale which takes all the life out of you; you feel muffled up with nothing on but a vest and shorts; and after twenty-four hours of it you wish you'd stayed at home and helped Mother. Everything is a beastly dull, gloomy grey;

you don't know where the sea ends and the clouds begin; it's all shrieking, warm, fierce gusts which whip off the tops of the seas and sweep them to leeward in leaden sheets. It's the limit!

If it went on much longer it would blow us up the Persian Gulf. With those awnings holding the wind we were making so much leeway that I tried to furl them. We did unlace the awnings over the fo'c'sle and the deck-house and capture them, but when we started with the big one aft and had it half unlashed an extra-sized gust simply tore it out of our hands, ripped the remaining laces, and swept it away, high in the air, whirling and twirling to leeward like a tablecloth.

When the *kaus*, tired with playing with it, dropped it into the sea a mile astern, the Gunner bellowed: " We wanted a new awning; now they'll let us have one."

" My dear chap," I bellowed back, " for goodness sake have a look at yourself; your hair wants ' parting '; you're a disgrace to the *Harold*."

He grinned.

I went along presently to have a look at Harrison's wounded chaps. My fellows had rigged up hammocks for them in what we called our mess deck, and only the old stoker with the bullet through his legs had any grievance. He thought he ought to have another blanket. My blessed Aunt! The other two were sticking it cheerfully enough, and the Petty Officer confided to me that " That there stoker, 'e'd 'ave a grouse in 'evving, that 'e would ".

It turned out that they had to stick it for another

forty-eight hours; the *kaus* kept us hove to all that day and most of the next night; but it began to veer to the south'ard in the morning watch, and two hours later we increased to five knots and edged along Muscat way. An hour later the stars came out, the breeze dropped altogether, and when the sun rose it rose on an almost calm sea.

Bostock rigged up his wretched aerial on the fore masthead and buzzed off a signal to the Flagship that we were coming along "all merry and bright" —in case she had begun to worry about us—and eventually we picked up the jagged rocky coast near Muscat early next morning.

I generally shoved the old packet up the harbour as far as she'd go, dropped her anchor, and skipped ashore to have a yarn with the Political Agent and then spend the day with my old pal the Army doctor, Morgan, who ran a little hospital and " did " Political Agent when the other chap was away.

But when Bostock came along bursting with importance, his polished-up telescope under one arm and a bundle of flags under the other, I realized that the Flagship lay inside and that I was up agin it.

The ginger-headed hypocrite had oiled a beautiful curl over his forehead and stuck on clean things. I looked round; Malony had somebody's new helmet on his head and had whitened his shoes; everyone had tidied himself for the occasion; the Gunner looked like a new pin; and as for Alexander the Great, he might have been a bloated aristocrat standing at the door of my dog-kennel of a cabin in his best white

turban and jacket and looking me up and down reproachfully.

I'd almost forgotten the beastly Flagship. I'd have to go on board and report to the Flag Captain; worse than that, the Admiral would probably want to hear all about our little rumpus and ask me to lunch. Oh, horrors!

Bostock's little pendants fluttered up to the masthead, and then it was time for me to get a move on.

" What ho! Within!" I roared at Alexander. " Lay me out fine linen and comely attire withal! Deck me for the banquet; get a drop of ' turps ' and rub the paint off my shins; anoint me for the sacrifice!"

He went off for the turpentine, not understanding the rest of my homely language. " Only the paint, my hero, not the skin!" I implored him as he rubbed vigorously, while I tried to make myself respectable.

With a pair of the Gunner's white trousers, much too tight for me, my own tunic, a pair of the Gunner's socks, my own buckskin shoes and No. 1 helmet which Alexander had ready for me, white as snow, I was ready to appear on deck.

Bostock yelled in his most professional voice: " Flagship hoists the affirmative, sir!" Down came his little bits of coloured bunting, and I knew that in a couple of minutes the Signal Midshipman aboard the Flagship would be knocking at the Flag Captain's door and reporting: " Armed launch *Harold* made her number, sir."

Then it began—oh, dear! oh, dear! what a life! Up and down went our answering pendant; before I had time to read one signal, Bostock had to take in

the next. We had to anchor on a bearing on the Flagship—good-bye to my usual cosy corner; we had to report the names and official numbers of the wounded; we had to report how much bread and how much meat and coal and water we wanted—as if I knew off-hand. By the time the Gunner and I had thought of a number, doubled it, divided it by three and guessed something else, we were steaming in among the Flagship and the *Apollo* and the *Intrepid*, looking like a miserable tramp with no after awning, patches of paint off our funnel and the sides—off everywhere and everything—and the stump of the fore top-mast sticking up overhead. I saw the lordly gentlemen on the Flagship's quarter-deck looking at us superciliously through their telescopes, and then I caught sight of old Sammy Dodington waving his hand from the *Apollo's* poop. I waved back to him, but the Gunner—the bully—suggested that it might be as well to stand to attention.

" Jolly sound idea! I'd forgotten all about that."

So we all stood and faced the Flagship; the Gunner and I saluted in our best manner; Alexander the Great, at my side, saluted too; a bugler on board her blared out the attention; the young gentlemen tucked their telescopes under their arms and assumed the appropriate attitudes, and by the time I'd a crick in the back of my neck her bugler sounded the " carry on ".

We dropped our anchor somewhere where we thought she wanted us to drop it—and that was over.

Alexander had my sword ready; he buckled it round me, handed me a pair of white kid gloves; the Gunner, saluting (the coward!—he never saluted me at other times), reported the dinghy alongside, and in ten

minutes I found myself on the Flagship's quarterdeck.

" My dear old Flags," I said to the Flag Lieutenant, an old pal of mine, " don't let your Old Man ask me to a meal; I can't sit down in these trousers—they're the Gunner's and they'd bust," but he only grinned; and a Midshipman, the Flag Captain's " doggie ", led me down below.

A cheerful bloke the Flag Captain, a little fox-terrier kind of a chap who barked at me in a friendly way, wanted me to sit down and tell him all about it. Then he took me aft to the Admiral, who wanted somebody to amuse him, so made me tell the whole story again. After that the very polite Secretary had to come along and hear me repeat it, and just as I thought I might be able to escape into the wardroom and sample something with real ice in it, the Admiral suggested that the Intelligence officer, the Major of Marines, would be interested, and sent for him. In he came, a fine figure of a soldier, two rows of medal ribbons on his white tunic—I wished the Gunner could have seen him—and I had to trot out my yarn a fourth time. I knew it off by heart now, and almost commenced, " Once upon a time there lived a naughty man named Mir Barkhat Khan and a very nice fat old man—he was really rather naughty, but people didn't know it—called the Derya Begi," but I stuck to a slightly more official style.

They had all heard of my old friend B.K., and when at last I was thrown out the Secretary took me into his cabin and told me the very interesting news that the Navy and the Indian Government intended to land nearly a thousand men at the eastern end of the Mekran coast, somewhere near Chahbar—two hundred

miles to the east of Jask—and teach the Baluchi chiefs up in the hills that they had better not listen to Mir Barkhat Khan or help the Ghilzai gun-running caravans.

"What would you like to do?" he asked me. "The Admiral has offered you the choice; you can go down the coast with the Flagship—if you care to do so!"

Well, I wasn't born yesterday! That jolly well meant doing ferry boat for the Flagship, at everybody's beck and call night and day.

"My own little bit of coast, all the time, Secretary. When your people land down there, all the gun-running dhows will come along to my end of the coast. I'll stick to that. That's where I want to be. I'd like to push off directly I've got the new awning and fore top-mast the Flag Captain is having made."

"Right-o, old chap! I'll see what can be done."

So I gave him my blessing and had nearly fled into my dirty little dinghy, when that confounded Flag Lieutenant waylaid me and told me that I had to dine with the Admiral.

"You freebooter! you gilded popinjay! Didn't I tell you I've only had six hours' sleep in the last three days? Didn't I tell you that I had no decent clothes? Didn't I tell you that I don't own a boiled shirt? Didn't I——"

"Sorry, old chap! dinner's at 7-30; don't keep the Old Man waiting!" was all the comfort and sympathy I got from the wretch.

By the time I returned to the dear old dirty *Harold* the wounded had already been taken away, and the Flagship's shipwrights and carpenters were measuring

her for a new mast and awnings. So off I dashed to see if Sammy Dodington could rig me out in some of his nice things for the Admiral's dinner party, and, of course, while I was in the *Apollo's* wardroom " Our Willie " recognized my hearty laugh and came in, twitching his little beard at me. " Ah! ah! Our Honourable come back from the wars?"

He had a nasty habit—one of many—of calling me " Our Honourable "; it made me long to wring his neck; but the story of Harrison, the Sub, and the thousand rifles had to be told once more, and I didn't get away till nearly midday.

As Dodington saw me over the gangway I told him that I'd given his young Sub the rough end of my tongue for bolting ahead and shooting that Afghan chap.

" Do him good," he said; " he'll turn out all right —in time."

In a quarter of an hour I had changed into my old grey flannel suitings and was on my way ashore to my Army doctor pal, Morgan. If he hadn't enough tiffin for two, he could sit and watch me eat his. It would teach him to have a meal ready for me whenever the *Harold* came into harbour.

I found Hume, the *Apollo's* Staff Surgeon, with him, looking even more worried than usual. He had brought ashore those three wounded, and they had been stitching up the Petty Officer and the stoker with a bullet through his shoulder.

Hume left us presently; we banged each other in the chest, and he gave me a top-hole feed. A great chap Morgan—a Major in the Indian Medical Service

—the keenest doctor and the keenest sportsman in the wide world. He looked as hard as nails, was nearly as broad as myself, and six inches taller. He had spent years in Indian Frontier Posts, and what he didn't know about the tribes beyond it wasn't worth knowing. He could speak their language, and they brought their wounded and ill people to him; they all knew him, and he wandered among them where scarcely another white man dare go.

He had been sent down to this semi-political job two years ago, and if you wanted to know anything about the tribes of Southern Arabia or Baluchistan he could tell you. He had already made a great reputation among them for "eye" surgery—especially cataract—and in this part of the world, what with the glare of the sun, the sand in the air, and the flies, an enormous number of natives get cataract. People came to him from both shores of the Persian Gulf, from the interior of Arabia, from the Baluchistan mountains, and even from his old haunts on the North-West Frontier, nearly a thousand miles away.

The walls of his room were covered with quaint things given him by the grateful chaps, and every one of them had a history.

"What's that?" I asked him, pointing to a queer-looking goatskin water-bag hanging on the veranda rail.

He handed it to me. It was entirely covered with very fine writing etched into the skin.

"Quaint, isn't it?" he said. "An Arab sent it me the other day. He's chief of one of the tribes a hundred miles inland, one of the chaps in revolt

against the Sultan. He smuggled himself in, wanted a cataract ' done ', and smuggled himself out again. He sent a letter with it; wrote that he could see to fight once more, and was so pleased about it that he sent me the water-bag which had belonged to him and the chiefs before him for nearly a hundred and fifty years. It always hung from the chief's camel when the tribe went fighting. That writing all over it is bits of the Koran suitable for war. Interesting, isn't it?"

He took me along and showed me a couple of chaps sitting in one corner of his little hospital, a corner fitted with dark blinds to keep out the light, sitting with bandages round their heads and over their eyes, quietly smoking at a " hubbly-bubbly " between them.

He spoke to them cheerily; they showed their white teeth in broad smiles, and he brought me back to the easy chairs on the veranda overlooking the harbour and the ships.

" Who are they?" I asked.

" Two Baluchi chiefs, I imagine. They've spent their lives trying to kill each other, and they came along here—a few days apart—neither knowing the other was coming. They both had ' cataracts '—each had one bad eye. I'd finished the first, and he was so bandaged that when the other came he could not see him nor be recognized; and now I've done the second, and they're so much bandaged that they've never seen each other. They know that they speak neighbouring Baluchi dialects, and for the last ten days they've been trying to find out who the other is

and what actual tribe he belongs to. It's as good as a play to listen to them questioning each other and giving very cautious answers."

"You should take off their bandages and tell them to kiss and make friends," I told him; but he only gave one of his deep laughs and grunted: "I'll take care that the first chap has a good start before I let the other go."

We were talking about the extraordinary vitality of the natives of the world, and he gave instances of some marvellous recoveries he had seen from very terrible injuries.

"Only a few days ago a chap came to me—I couldn't tell by his clothes where he came from, but I think he must have been a Baluchi too—he spoke like one. Some time or other he must have had the whole side of his face and neck blown away—how the main artery escaped I can't imagine. He had a scar from his collar-bone to his cheek-bone—nothing but scar that side, yet he seemed little the worse for it, had rather a husky voice, but could manage to eat with the other side of the jaw."

"Which side?" I asked.

"Left, I think; yes, the left side."

"What did he want with you?" I began to sit up and take notice now.

"Rather a strange case," Morgan went on. "I felt sorry for the fellow; he'd brought along a weedy-looking youngster—his son, his only son, he told me—and he wanted me to make him strong, strong enough to follow him when he died, strong enough to fight. I overhauled the lad and kept him here for a

few days, and I'm certain that he has something wrong with his appendix—you don't meet many of them going wrong this side of the Red Sea. I wanted to take it out; but you know these chaps; it's against their religion to be cut up. They don't mind me making a little nick in their eyes so that they can recognize an enemy before he knifes them, but this job is rather different. At any rate, the fellow with the scar wouldn't let me do it, and took his son away again."

" Who was your friend? Who d'you think he was?" I grinned at him.

He didn't know, didn't know him from Adam; and I was just going to tell him (everything fitted in completely), but his " boy " brought out a letter, and when I recognized the Flag Lieutenant's scrawly writing on the envelope I guessed that my pal had been dragged into the Admiral's dinner party too, and gave a joyous whoop and smote him on the back.

" I'm another victim. Buck up! If you'll lend me a boiled shirt—old Sammy Dodington's shirts are too small round the neck—I'll get Flags to put us next each other."

So what with hunting out a shirt and a collar and finding a pair of his patent-leather shoes which fitted my webbed feet, I forgot about his Baluchi friend until his " boy " had packed them up.

" D'you know who your friend was—the one with the appendix son?" I remembered to ask him when he chucked me out because he had some work to do. " It was Mir Barkhat Khan!"

I told him how I knew.

He whistled, looked interested, and gave one of his cheery grunts.

" Well, he was safe here in hospital. If he'd been ten Barkhat Khans he was safe, and I expect he knew it."

So off I went back to the *Harold*, for Alexander the Great and the Gunner to prepare me for the feast.

What a life!

CHAPTER VII

The "Apollo" has a Job

When the little armed launch *Harold* steamed into Muscat that morning with Harrison's wounded men on board and so many signs of her three days of battling against the south-easterly gale, she found most of the ships of the Gulf Squadron assembled there—*Intrepid* (Senior Naval Officer's ship), *Apollo*, *Merlin* (sloop), and *Sphinx*, the only paddle-wheeler and the oldest ship in the Navy in active commission.

Outside the harbour with the two cruisers lay the Flagship of the East Indian Squadron flying the flag of the Commander-in-Chief, Rear-Admiral Sir Henry Mortimer.

These ships had gathered here in order that their Captains might report to the Commander-in-Chief the effects of the existing blockade and discuss with him measures for making it still more effective.

Conditions had changed considerably during the last two years. Before that time gun-running dhows sailed openly from Muscat under French, Turkish, Persian, or Muscat colours, and under these colours their cargoes could not be seized at sea. In fact, unless an English cruiser or her boats intercepted the rifles *after* they had been landed on the Persian coast and

before camel caravans had carried them away inland, there was little chance of capturing them.

For the last two years, however, the Persian Government and the Sultan of Muscat had withdrawn the protection of their flags; they now allowed their dhows to be searched by British cruisers and, if found to be carrying rifles or ammunition, allowed them to be captured and condemned as prizes. Only the *bona fide* Turkish and French dhows could sail in safety from Muscat.

But as there were not sufficient of these to carry on the gun-running traffic successfully, the merchants of Muscat adopted the plan of sending rifles and ammunition out of the town on the backs of camels, to some village on the coast, north or south of it, where they could hide them until they knew that the coast was clear. Then one of their own dhows would sail round and take them across the Gulf.

The result had been that, instead of only having to patrol outside Muscat itself, British cruisers, gunboats, and armed launches now had to watch more than two hundred miles of coast-line north and south of this harbour—a very different matter.

At this time Ali Musa, an Algerian, the agent of a French firm of rifle importers, had become the most important man in this trade. He always possessed an almost uncanny knowledge of the exact whereabouts of every cruiser, gunboat, and armed launch on either coast, and he made his arrangements accordingly, often with great success.

In spite of the increasing number of captured cargoes during the last year, he still walked about Muscat with

a cheerful smile on his face, always had a cheery "*bon jour, comment ça va?*" when he met the Political Agent or the Army Doctor, sipped his coffee in the bazaar at night with mysterious strangers, marked on the chart in his office the places where English ships had been seen recently, and planned new schemes for circumventing them.

However cheerfully he smiled, he was by no means having it his own way. The Political Agent, Colonel Macaulay, a tall, careworn man always fighting against his old malarial troubles, had his spies scattered up and down Arabian villages; half a battalion of Indian troops stationed at Jask itself closed the opposite coast in that immediate neighbourhood, and the naval patrol grew more and more effective.

Ali Musa also had many personal enemies: merchants who had been ruined; nakhodas who had lost all they possessed when rifles and dhows had been captured. They—many of them—blamed him for the failure of their plans and sought revenge. Only a month before the arrival of the Flagship, a twisted scrap of paper thrown over the wall of the Consulate compound had been the clue to where a couple of thousand rifles lay hidden in a village to the north; and another of Ali Musa's schemes had been checkmated by the finding of a tiny chart inserted into a melon on the Colonel's dinner-table. Do not imagine that all mysterious communications were genuine; many were made with the intention of driving ships away on a wild-goose chase.

The Flagship's shipwrights and carpenters had made the *Harold* a new fore top-mast and fitted new awnings;

her own crew had slapped a coat of white paint over her, and she had gone back to her job. Harrison's three wounded men were " going on first rate ", as Smedley, the Petty Officer, put it, on board the *Apollo*; and all the ships had returned to their various patrol duties except that ship herself. Her Captain liked to bask in the sunshine of the Commander-in-Chief, and found daily some fresh excuse for doing so. He would take him ashore for a walk, show him over the two Portuguese forts, pour into his ears all the knowledge of the Gulf and the gun-running trade which he had learnt from his First Lieutenant (Dodington), and flatter him skilfully.

So while the Flagship awaited the coming of the Indian troopships from Karachi, the *Apollo* waited with her, her officers and men grumbling that they did not get on with their work.

" Might as well auction them things of late able-seaman Roberts, sir," the Master-at-Arms suggested to Sammy Dodington one morning; so after evening quarters, when the sunlight crept under the awnings, his seaman's bag, his banjo, and a few curios the poor chap had bought up and down the Gulf were brought on deck alongside the starboard gangway, and the little rolls of uniform from the bag were spread out in the sun. The crew, crowding aft, made a circle round them while the Master-at-Arms mounted an upturned tub and the ship's Writer stood beside him with a notebook and pencil.

" Afore we begin," the Master-at-Arms rapped out, " I'll ask Writer Smith to tell you all what the poor fellow did with his wages."

Thereupon Writer Smith picked up the ship's ledger, opened it, and read: "'Able-Seaman Roberts—allotment, three pounds ten shillings a month to Mrs. Mary Ibbetts, 78 West Street, Little Chudleigh, Devon, England—relationship, sister.'

"I knows, and *some* of you knows, that that Mrs. Ibbetts was the chap's sister—a widow—'er 'usband leaving 'er with four children and nothing in the Post Office when 'e got 'isself killed in a quarry. Now you *all* knows where 'is wages went; and see you bids 'earty!"

The Writer picked up the nearest roll and held up a pair of begrimed duck trousers. "Them's 'is coaling rig; any bid?"

A stoker bid half a crown, a seaman five shillings. The Writer entered his name in the book and tossed them across to him, and he tossed them back on the deck. They were auctioned again, and another seaman bid seven and six, had the amount put down, and threw them back. The Writer held up a pair of boots. A stoker wanted them and tried them on. They fitted him, so his messmates bid against him until he, for very shame, bid as much as thirty shillings—three times their actual value; and then they jeered at him as he shamefacedly carried them down to his mess.

A No. 1 blue jumper came next and was sold three times over before the last man kept it; then a pair of No. 1 serge trousers. Bids came from every side, and a young marine called out rather shyly: "Two pounds!"

"Take you three months to pay for them, young feller," the Writer cautioned him before he stuck his name down in the book.

" Stick me down, Writer. I don't mind," and he threw them back again, explaining: " 'E did me a good turn—back in Colombo—that Roberts—bit of a razzle with some soldiers—didn't 'arf knock 'em about."

Smedley, with his head still bandaged, came along from the sick-bay and bid against another Petty Officer till he bought a " flannel " for five pounds and kept it, muttering, " That there chap and me 'ave been in a tidy few scraps together—one time and another," as his excuse. Jeremiah Tims, carried aft with his legs in splints, explained that " 'E couldn't get in no bid, no 'ow, with everyone a-pressing in front of 'im; and 'e wanted 'is pal's socks and would give ten bob for a pair of 'em ".

The lascars came to buy up the things that had been thrown back after purchase, and then they all began bidding for his banjo, in the middle of which Captain Williams came alongside in his galley, and the crowd of men did not scatter out of his way quickly enough, face aft, and salute him.

" Mr. First Lieutenant! Am I or am I not to be received properly when I come aboard *my* ship?" he snapped at the flustered First Lieutenant.

" Very sorry, sir," Sammy Dodington explained. " I gave them permission to sell the effects of the late able-seaman Roberts. He kept his widowed sister and her four children, and the men are keen to send her a good lot of money; they were rather excited."

" You'll have it done somewhere else, Mr. First Lieutenant. Send them away from the gangway," he snorted.

So the Master-at-Arms and the Writer and the

irritated men had to shift the remainder of Roberts's things farther for'ard; the eagerness to bid died away, and presently only the lascars were left there to wrangle over the odds and ends.

"Well, how much did you take, Master-at-Arms?" Sammy Dodington asked, as he and the Writer came aft to report the auction completed.

The Writer, adding up the figures, made them thirty five pounds seventeen shillings. "We'll make it up to forty pounds on the mess deck, what with the men away on duty and this one and that one," the Master-at-Arms assured him.

The wardroom officers subscribed five pounds, the Captain ungraciously added a pound; so by the next homeward mail forty-six pounds went to Mrs. Ibbetts and her four children; and the ditty box with her photograph in the lid, and her letters to Roberts, tied up with his knife lanyard and the curios he had bought for her, went back to the girl who was waiting to marry him when he should come home.

On the following day it had been arranged that the Flagship and the *Apollo* should go out of harbour and tow targets for each other while ordinary-seamen's gunnery-training classes fired aiming-tube (Morris-tube) practice.

But that night the Admiral had slept badly—very badly indeed. For hours he had twisted and tossed on his sleeping-mat in the sticky heat of his cabin—turned and twisted this way and that. He had managed to drop off to sleep by daybreak, but then the quarterdeck men, scrubbing overhead, woke him again. Worse

still, his servant had forgotten to " trim " the wind-scoops in his cabin scuttles, and the water from the splashing fire-hoses up on deck began to trickle with a cheerful gurgle into his bed.

What with ringing one bell for his servant and another for the sentry; what with his morning cup of tea being nearly cold and tasting of nothing but fish; what with one thing and another, he was thoroughly upset. The climax came when the Flag Captain knocked at his door, barked respectfully, and reported that the main condenser inlet was choked with jellyfish and the ship could not go to sea.

In fact, for the last twenty-four hours or more the Flagship had been sucking in and trying to distil so many millions of tiny jellyfish that the whole system of pipes had become blocked. That is why the Admiral had noticed a strong taste of fish in his morning tea, and that is the reason why his Flagship with her burnished guns, glistening white sides, and his flag flying so proudly at the fore could not carry out the firing arranged with the *Apollo*.

It annoyed the Admiral to have no one to blame; it was no use to blame the jellyfish; they were dead—millions and millions of them; he had sampled them in his morning tea and sampled more in his breakfast coffee; so he bit off the ear of the Flag Captain; the Flag Captain snapped at the Commander, and the bitterly disappointed gunnery-lieutenant and everyone tried to make the unhappy Fleet Engineer feel that they were his own tame jellyfish which now interfered with the Flagship's routine.

On that very same morning Ram Singh Matala, the

Indian " boy " who looked after the Army Doctor on shore and supervised his house, went as usual to purchase food in the bazaar. As he passed a little stall where he generally bought his master's fruit, the old Arab squatting behind it, busily waving away the flies, called out loudly the excellence of his wares. Ram Singh did not want any fruit that morning, but something in the old man's face as he caught his eye made him stop and bend down to examine them. The Arab held out two handfuls of figs and pressed them on him, pushing them one by one into his basket, praising them loudly—" Fit for the table of the Sirkar lords—fit for a banquet in Paradise—sweet as the nectar of bees "—and in between each shrill phrase he dropped his voice: " Bunduk—many bunduk "—and again, " Karyat al Kabira—Karyat al Kabira "—and then: " Richer than the milk of a young goat fed on the grapes of Omarah—bunduk—go Karyat al Kabira—two nights gone." Then he began bargaining loudly so that all the motley crowd could hear, and as Ram Singh took them away, pursued him with curses, calling to everyone that the unclean servant of the unbeliever had given him less than he had paid for them at Mattrah only that very morning.

The Doctor's servant had dealt with the old man ever since he had come to Muscat with his master, and he knew the story of how Ali Musa had forced him from his former tiny shop because it stood in the way of a new rifle-warehouse he wanted to build. He knew it well, for a hundred times the old Arab had told him how he had been defrauded, or thought he had. So as Ram Singh hurried back to the hospital he kept on

repeating " Karyat al Kabira " lest he should forget it.

He found the Army Doctor, Major Morgan, sprawling in his chair on the veranda and told him what had happened, adding: " Arab very much anger Ali Musa—think Ali Musa bad man."

Major Morgan went across to the Political Agent, and both men thought the story sufficiently important to be passed on to the Admiral.

However, the Admiral had been bothered all day with telegrams from Karachi changing first one detail and then another of the coming expedition; he was still annoyed with the jellyfish in his Flagship's condensers and in everything he tasted; and he thought that the source of the story made it scarcely worth while sending a ship fifty miles down the coast on the mere chance of it being true. His own knowledge of Gulf conditions being very little, he sent for Captain Williams and talked it over with him.

" It's rather a cock-and-bull story, isn't it?" he said.

Now, Captain Williams disliked the authority of the Political Agent; he disliked all soldiers, and especially Army doctors, so he was only too pleased to twitch his little beard and agree with the Commander-in-Chief.

" Of course it is, sir; of course it is. If we listened to every bazaar tale we should be dashing here, there, and everywhere. From what I know of these people——"

But the Admiral did not learn what he knew—not just then, for the Flag Lieutenant brought in another

letter from the Political Agent with the information that two empty dhows were filling up their fresh-water barrels and preparing for sea.

This rather corroborated the hospital servant's story.

Going out on his stern walk, the Admiral could see two big dhows under Merani Castle flying Turkish colours and lying very high out of water. " The crews are busy on deck," the Flag Lieutenant told him, as he watched them through his telescope.

" Well, well! It's better to send a ship on a goose chase than to do nothing. I'll send you down there, Williams; you know all about that kind of job; make your own arrangements."

" Certainly, sir, certainly. I shall be only too pleased," and Captain Williams went back to his ship.

" Mr. First Lieutenant," he snapped, as he stepped on board, " I'm going to sea to-night; I'll write my orders directly."

" We're getting out of it at last, you fellows," Sammy Dodington told the others, as he limped into the ward-room. " Hooray!"

" Where are we going? What's the job?" they asked.

" Better go aft and ask the Skipper," he suggested, grinning.

So when the sun rose next morning the *Apollo* might have been seen steaming gently down the coast—Muscat thirty miles astern of her—rolling easily as her stern pushed through the long, smooth swell sliding under her and breaking in a mass of white foam at the feet of the stupendous cliffs, a mile on her starboard beam. Under her white awnings fifty seamen and

marines prepared their landing-gear, filled their bandoliers and pouches and their almost as precious water-bottles; others, up on the boat-booms, mounted a Maxim in the bows of her steam-cutter and cleared away her barge for hoisting out.

Those two dhows which had sailed under Turkish colours had not been signalled in the night, and they were not in sight now. Twenty miles farther along the coast the village of Karyat (the larger) stood at the head of a cliff or gap in the great wall of coast-line, the mouth of it protected from the monsoon swell by tumbled masses of rock which had fallen when some great convulsion of the earth's crust—ages ago—had split those towering cliffs.

Captain Williams was so convinced that he had been sent off on a wild-goose chase that he would not listen to any suggestion from his First Lieutenant. Sammy Dodington had tried to make him realize that if arms *had* been brought to the village, watchers would probably be stationed on the top of the cliffs to give warning of any approaching ship. He had pointed out that if those dhows were coming to pick them up they must still be far astern, and he had suggested that at dawn the *Apollo* should be in a position south of Karyat and at least ten miles from shore. They could see those dhows from the masthead; could wait until they had gone up to the village, give them plenty of time to anchor inside and commence to load up, and then dash up at full speed, send in the landing-party, and not give the villagers either time to embark all the rifles or to load them on the camels again and take them inland.

Instead of this Captain Williams pushed the *Apollo* as close as he dared to the jumbled masses of rock across the entrance, dropped his anchor, and commenced to get out his boats. Directly they were in the water—riding uncomfortably in the swell—and the nine-pounder field-gun had been lowered on to its mounting in the barge's bow, the bos'n's mate piped " Away landing-parties ".

In three-quarters of an hour the little expedition started for the shore—the steam-cutter, in charge of Jackson, with a Maxim in her bow, and Hume, the Staff Surgeon, and his sick-berth steward in the stern-sheets, towing the barge, her nine-pounder gun and her fifty seamen and marines under command of Tommy Briggs. Astern of the barge came the Captain himself in his galley, with the excited Captain's Clerk, a signalman, and the interpreter.

Sammy Dodington, left in command, hobbled up to the fore bridge and watched the three boats and their three white ensigns make their way to the white masses of foam; he saw them pass the little white-washed cairn of stones at the end of the natural breakwater and disappear behind it.

Just as he lost sight of them a signalman called out and pointed along the coast to the north'ard. There, beating up against the faint southerly breeze, he saw two large dhows.

" Three hours too early, old chap," he said to the Paymaster, who had joined him on the bridge.

CHAPTER VIII

The "Apollo" searches a Village

When the *Apollo's* landing-party rounded the end of the natural breakwater and found itself in between the perpendicular cliffs on either side, the steam-cutter pressed on towards the village of Karyat (the larger) half a mile ahead—a long straggling collection of mud huts along the top of a sandy beach on each side of a little river. Behind the huts rose the usual dark background of palm and nabac trees, and above them the blank red-coloured walls of the usual fort or sheikh's house. Anchored in front of the village lay a few small fishing-craft, and drawn up on the shore many boats. Some Arabs stood among them calmly watching the approaching British; and women, washing clothes at the river mouth, went on with their work; everything seemed absolutely calm and peaceful.

A hundred yards from shore the steam-cutter cast off the barge, the barge cast off the galley, and the Captain pulled in towards a group of unarmed men slowly coming down the beach. The cutter and the barge lay with their bows pointing shorewards and their Maxim and nine-pounder ready for emergencies.

A tall, richly dressed old man with henna-stained

beard and a green turban separated himself from the group and advanced to the water's edge as the galley's bows dug themselves into the sand. Captain Williams scrambled along the boat and jumped ashore, the interpreter and the Clerk following him.

The Arab—the Sheikh of Karyat—welcomed him gravely, asked to what fortunate happening he owed this unlooked for happiness; and when told that the Captain had come in search of any rifles or ammunition brought to his village, still more gravely denied any knowledge of them. He allowed his impassive face, just for one moment, to express slight annoyance at the mere suggestion. He turned and called to the others, questioning them when they joined him. Their faces showed only blank surprise and astonishment, and Captain Williams felt more convinced than ever that he was only wasting his time. However, now that he had come all this way, he might as well search the village. The Sheikh raised no opposition whatever, only asking for time to let the women leave their huts; he suggested that Captain Williams should pay his unworthy self the great honour of visiting his " entirely contemptible hovel " of a fort and drinking a little of his " despicable " coffee. He would then make certain that no rifles were *there*; and after the women had been collected inside it the bluejackets could search their huts.

Not a single being showed the slightest sign of hostility; the fishermen went up and down the beach spreading their nets to dry; the women only left off their washing, reluctantly, when their men folk sent them away, and a troop of laughing, black-eyed, half-

naked children gathered round to see the strangers. They scampered up the beach when the Arabs threatened them with their long sticks, only to come down again; they thronged round the Captain's Clerk, darting in to touch his white hand or his revolver holster, and darting back again with peals of laughter. The Clerk enjoyed himself hugely, but did not remain long the centre of attraction, because Tommy Briggs and his fifty men landed, formed up at the water's edge, and stood at ease, the children deserting him for the grinning delighted seamen and marines. He then had to follow the Captain and the Sheikh as they walked slowly towards the fort, while the coxswain of the galley and half a dozen seamen came along to search it.

At the fort the Sheikh dismissed all the Arabs except two or three older men, more richly dressed than the others. He pointed with pride to two very fine riding camels kneeling close to the entrance, and the Clerk simply trembled with excitement when they passed through the great archway, with its two swinging iron-studded doors, into a gloomy passage with openings on either side leading into small square rooms. In one he saw a miserable-looking wretch sitting on the brick floor with his feet in a kind of stocks; in the other hung, from wooden pegs, rifles, bandoliers, leather belts and pouches; round the foot of the walls, in orderly rows, lay silver-studded horse- and camel-saddles with the bridles and trappings arranged neatly above them. The passage led into an open court surrounded by a gallery supported on wooden posts, with wooden railings and a trellis-work, green—delight-

fully green—with the leaves of twining vines. Behind and above the screen of vines stood the high walls of the fort and the ramparts for the garrison, the blue sky overhead. A curiously shaped well stood in the centre of the courtyard, its wooden bucket and earthenware and copper water-vessels scattered round it; tethered to the gallery posts, horses whisked their tails to drive off a plague of flies, and goats and long-legged chickens poked and scratched in the litter of straw and manure.

He followed up a flight of broad red-brick steps to the gallery and its screen of vines; a red curtain was drawn back by a negro, and the Sheikh ushered them into a square room with latticed stonework windows and a raised platform at one end, covered with rich rugs; other rugs, not so rich, covered the uneven floor. The negro drew the curtain behind them and shut out most of the light—it was beautifully cool and there were no flies.

The Sheikh made them sit down on the raised platform, the Captain on his right with the interpreter behind him, and the Clerk on his left, while the old men squatted on the floor rugs. The curtain was drawn aside, two more negroes brought in brass trays with a great brass coffee-pot, little silver coffee-cups, cigarettes in a curious old silver box, and a small coffee-brazier. The Clerk did not like the look of the thick, black, treacly coffee, but he sipped it, saw the Sheikh bowing to him, and bowed back; the old men bowed to him and he to them; never in all his life had he felt so important, and he wished that he could talk to them. He let them examine his

revolver; opened it and closed it, and showed them the cartridges in the chamber. They gave him their daggers, drawing them out of their silver ornamented sheaths to let him feel how sharp were the edges, and they put them back through their girdles, smiling indulgently at his youthful face. They made him look out of the stone lattice-work of the window and see the village, the fishing-boats on the beach, the little line of seamen and marines still surrounded by children, the *Apollo's* three boats with their white ensigns, close inshore, and the high, rocky, overhanging cliffs which shut out the sea.

The Captain, finding conversation tedious, sent him to find out if the bluejackets had searched the fort; so he bowed to the Sheikh and he bowed to his old friends; the curtain drew back for him, and he went along the gallery, looking for the coxswain of the galley. From another red curtain two little children, a boy and a girl, peeped out at him, he held out his hand, and the little girl came out shyly, clutching a little bundle of a doll; she clutched his hand and walked along the gallery with him.

Looking over it, through a gap in the vine, he saw the coxswain and called down to him. The Petty Officer wiped his forehead and sung out that " they'd been all over the blessed fort and, but for the rifles in the guardroom, not a rifle could they find ".

Back he went with the little girl still holding on to one hand with her chubby little brown fingers and henna-stained finger-nails, and as he passed the curtained door again her brother, growing bolder, dashed

out and seized the other. They were all laughing together—happy, jolly—and when the grinning negro pulled back the curtain of the Sheikh's hall he found himself standing in full view of the Captain with the two children hanging on to him so tightly that he couldn't get one hand free to salute. Even the grave Sheikh smiled for one moment; but the Captain snapped at him for being away so long, and he had to say good-bye to his little friends and follow him back to the beach. The Sheikh wanted a little more time to collect all the women into the fort, and then Tommy Briggs and his fifty men began searching the huts from one end of the village to the other. Briggs had often done this; many of his men had done so too—poke under the heaps of siss-palm leaves and straw in the little walled compounds round the huts, lift off some of the palm-leaf thatching, look under the mats on the floors to see if the hard mud had been disturbed lately and rifles buried there. For an hour and a half they worked and searched everywhere with not the trace of a rifle. The Captain, still more certain that he'd been sent on a fool's errand, and very impatient to be off back to Muscat, spoke irritably when Briggs at last came down the beach in a hurry.

" You're keeping me waiting a long time, Mr. Briggs; you've found nothing, I suppose?"

" No rifles, sir, not a trace of them; but behind the village there's a big open space—a sandy space—with marks of camels' feet and fresh camel droppings, marks where they knelt down and scrambled up again —hundreds of them. I think you ought to see them, sir. It looks as though a lot of camels had been there

this morning, and their tracks lead right inland along the stream."

Very irritated, the Captain followed him. Even he could see very plainly that many camels had been there recently. He sent for the Sheikh and pointed out the marks; but the old gentleman did not seem in the least flurried, and explained, through the interpreter, that "Many camels belong villagers—go to other villages—sell fish—come back with dates—sheep; camels always rest here, make many marks—Sheikh's riding camels walk up and down."

A seaman ran up from the beach with a message. The *Apollo's* Gunner had come ashore in the whaler with the news that two Turkish dhows had sailed past the *Apollo* and gone along down the coast.

"A confounded waste of time—the whole confounded business," the Captain snarled at Briggs, ordering him to embark his men and not keep him waiting any longer.

The barge and the galley came inshore and everybody embarked; the Sheikh and the old men gravely saluted; the children danced and shouted shrilly; the women came back to finish their wash clothes, and the steam-cutter towed the landing-party back to the *Apollo*.

"A fool's business, Mr. First Lieutenant. That's what comes of listening to soldiers' tales; not a sign of a rifle, not a case of ammunition; a few camel feet-marks, and that Mr. Briggs imagined a whole caravan had been there and wanted me to dash inland after them. You can tell my Clerk that this is the last time he goes ashore with me. He spent most of his time

playing with the dirty children. He's not to come to my cabin till he's cleaned himself. Get under weigh at once!"

He sent a wireless signal to the Commander-in-Chief. "Searched village this morning—no rifles—dhows flying Turkish colours sighted, proceeding down coast south of Karyat—request instructions." In half an hour he received orders to cruise off Karyat until dark and then return to Muscat if no dhows had entered the inlet.

The wardroom officers ate their belated lunch in very bad tempers. Even Sammy Dodington was surly; Jackson and Hume, the Staff Surgeon, had done nothing but sit in the stern-sheets of the cutter and look at the beach, and Briggs felt positive that, in spite of what the Sheikh said and the Captain believed, a large caravan of camels *had* been there that very morning.

"With our last Skipper," he said angrily, "we'd have shoved along after them."

"Ticklish business, that," and Sammy Dodington shook his head doubtfully. "If you'd seen those dhows, you'd have sworn that they had never intended to come in here. They were three miles out when they passed, and simply kept beating to the south'ard as though they were bound for Aden—or somewhere."

All that afternoon the *Apollo* steamed slowly backwards and forwards off the great gap in the cliffs, and never a sail did she see.

Night fell; back she went to Muscat, and just before midnight dropped her anchor in her old billet, close to the Flagship.

Directly the sun rose again and the Arab watchers on the cliffs above Karyat looked across the sea and saw it empty, they lighted great piles of brushwood and palm leaves and sent up into the still air a great column of smoke. Then they climbed down hurriedly to the village and the Sheikh's fort.

The morning after his return to Muscat from Karyat al Kabira, Captain Williams buckled on his sword and went across to the Flagship to report to the Commander-in-Chief.

"No luck yesterday, Williams?"

"None at all, sir; we've burnt a hundred and fifty tons of coal and come back again. Not a rifle, not a cartridge; we found a few traces of camels, but the Sheikh explained them quite satisfactorily. Those two dhows passed down the coast a couple of hours after I landed, and my First Lieutenant tells me that they showed no indication whatever of making for Karyat. A perfectly wild-goose chase, sir; we shan't believe those soldiers' yarns so readily next time, sir."

He went back to his ship very pleased with himself, and he felt still more pleased later on in the forenoon, for as he enjoyed a cigar in his cabin, a signal came from the Flagship: "*Apollo* prepare for sea immediately—steam for fifteen knots—the C.-in-C. will take passage in her."

So pleased was he to think that he would have the Commander-in-Chief as his guest on board his own ship—have him all to himself—that he actually unbent when the First Lieutenant came for orders, calling

him by his name: " Ah, my dear Dodington, we must ransack our stores and give the Commander-in-Chief a good dinner; tell my officers that I will introduce them to him—*if* he will allow me."

Even the loyal Dodington could not keep back a smile at this, and when he repeated the yarn in the wardroom, solemnly announcing that they were all promised that treat, the Captain must have wondered what caused the roar of laughter.

He could scarcely stand still with delight, three hours later, when the Admiral and the Flag Lieutenant did come on board. " You may have to put up with us for a couple of nights," the Admiral said, and Captain Williams twitched his beard with pleasure and said how delightful that would be.

But the Admiral had not his usual smile. " Get under weigh and go down to Karyat; get there as quickly as you can."

The Captain's face fell. " Karyat, sir?"

" Yes! The Political Agent has definite information that a very large caravan reached there two days ago. One of his own native agents came in with the news this morning. He counted three hundred camels before he left Karyat two nights ago."

" Perhaps it's another wild-goose chase, sir!" he said, ingratiatingly. " A pity to drag you out, sir."

" I don't think so; I should not be here if I did," and the Admiral positively snapped at him, Captain Williams crumbling up, opening his mouth, and looking crestfallen. He was only too glad to get away to the bridge and take the *Apollo* out of harbour.

The news quickly spread along the mess deck that

the ship was off to Karyat again; it was bellowed down into the engine-rooms and stokeholds. In ten minutes every soul on board knew that "Our Willie" had "got it in the neck" from the Admiral.

Down in the wardroom the usually flippant Flag Lieutenant, sitting on the table, questioned Briggs. "You thought camels had been there?"

"Hundreds of them—been there that very morning—their traces were quite fresh—you could smell nothing but camel."

He tried to find out what Sammy Dodington knew about it and thought about it, but could only get out of him: "The Skipper has only been a couple of months in the Gulf; he hasn't picked up the ropes yet."

"You've been here years and years, off and on; I should have thought he'd have asked your advice," but Sammy Dodington pretended to be very busy, and went away to supervise the landing-party. He knew that if the Skipper had only acted on his advice things might have turned out differently, but he *was* his Captain, and however much he disliked him he kept his mouth shut.

Franklin, the Clerk, would have liked to say a good deal, but nobody asked him.

By five o'clock the *Apollo*, with the yellow paint peeling off her two funnels in great patches, was abreast the gap in the cliffs which marked Karyat. The landing-party stood ready in the battery; steam had been raised again in the steam-cutter, and all was ready.

In another quarter of an hour she anchored; her boiler safety-valves lifted, and as the steam roared

from the " escapes " the bos'n's mate piped " Out barge and steam-cutter ". The men rushed off to the ropes, and, as they did so, out from that gap in the cliffs, towed past the white-washed cairn by half a dozen fishing-boats, came a dhow with her three great sails hanging limp and the Turkish ensign drooping over her stern rails. At the same moment a signalman up in the fore top yelled that he'd sighted a dhow, hull down, to the north-east.

The Admiral, who had come up to the bridge, turned to the wretched Captain and said sternly: " I'm afraid we're too late, Captain Williams."

" What would you like me to do, sir?" he asked humbly.

Unfortunately nothing could be done; Briggs went across in the whaler to make certain that the dhow's papers were in order. He found them signed by the Turkish Consul at Muscat, and stamped with the Consular stamp—three copies of them, in Arabic, French, and English—and could only hand them back to the stolid nakhoda and pull back again to report.

On the chance that the other dhow's papers were not in order, the Admiral ordered the Captain to weigh again and overhaul her; but by this time she was out of sight, below the horizon, and it was already growing dark.

As the *Apollo* steamed towards where the second dhow had last been seen and the cringing Captain vainly looked for her through his glasses in the gloom ahead, the Admiral snorted: " This is a wild-goose chase, if you like!"

With an angry Commander-in-Chief aboard, a

miserable Captain, and a secretly half-pleased crew, the *Apollo* spent the first part of the night steaming at full speed, making great circles, steaming ahead again, sweeping everywhere with her searchlights.

The Clerk, asleep in Lady Jane's cabin, woke suddenly. He thought he had heard a gun fired. His bunk was not shaking so much; the engines were slowing down; he heard the bang of a gun, for'ard; jumped out and dashed on deck in his pyjamas. The men came running aft to lower away the whaler, and Tommy Briggs, fastening a revolver belt round his waist, ran up to the poop. Looking over the port side, he saw a big dhow lighted up by the for'ard searchlight; saw her sails coming down, and saw the star and crescent on the Turkish flag at her mizzen-head. He watched the whaler pulling across to her; saw Tommy Briggs standing up in the stern-sheets, holding up his hand for something, and people bending over the dhow's side; saw the little yellow light of the boat's lantern held up. Briggs handed something back again and sat down in the boat; he saw the whaler shove off and knew that this dhow's papers were also in order. He wished that he were an Admiral; he would have put a few shells into her and sunk her, crew and all; nobody would be any the wiser, and her rifles would never get up to the Indian Frontier.

He went below and turned in again, feeling miserable.

On her way back to Muscat, the *Apollo* sent wireless messages to the *Intrepid*, patrolling the Persian coast to the east of Jask, and to the wireless station at Jask itself, that two dhows flying Turkish colours and

believed to be carrying large cargoes of rifles were steering towards the coast from Karyat. She tried to signal to the *Harold* and the armed launch *Miner*, assisting the *Intrepid*, but could get no reply; nor did she expect to do so. These armed launches only carry one signalman, and as he could not be at his wireless telephones at all hours, day and night, he listened-in only at stated times.

Outside Muscat—just before dawn—the Flagship's steam-barge waited to take off the Admiral, and his last words to the desolate Captain were: " You *may* have a chance of intercepting those rifles; if you do, you had *better* take advantage of it." The wretched Captain Williams didn't like the emphasis laid on the " better ".

Then the *Apollo* turned round and steamed towards that portion of the Persian coast which the *Harold* and her own two cutters guarded. Dense, indefinite, grey clouds crept up from south and east; the leaden surface of the water seemed absolutely lifeless, to lack even the energy to cover up the trace of her stern wash, trailing behind her to the horizon.

The Staff Surgeon, coming down to breakfast, grumbled that " it was working up for another *kaus*, and a *kaus* took all the life out of him; he hated them "; but Sammy Dodington beamed, " I believe it is, old chap; the second in a fortnight," and then a thought struck him and he burst out: " If it's a real good one, it will drive those two dhows up our way; we may get a look in after all."

" Do you really think we shall?" the Clerk asked excitedly.

When the *Apollo* had examined his papers, switched off her searchlights, and steamed away in the direction of Muscat, the nakhoda of that Turkish dhow gave thanks to Allah. He had expected that she would follow him all night, and had not made up his mind what to do. His instructions were to make some creek or village to the east of Jask and get orders, according to the movements of the British ships, where to land his rifles and ammunition.

So he hoisted his sails again to the night breeze coming out of the Gulf and bubbled quietly through the water, looking astern from time to time when the moon rose, hoping to catch sight of the other dhow.

The breeze began to fail him before dawn, and when daylight came the Arab helmsman hauled his thick tiller ropes this way and that, trying to keep the dhow on her course. The nakhoda looked anxiously at the grey masses of dark clouds spreading up from the horizon and shook his head doubtfully. Then he spread his prayer-mat on the high poop, stretched out his arms to the east, knelt, and prostrated himself for the threefold prayer.

Some thirty or forty Ghilzai Afghans, huddled together miserably under the gunwales, stirred themselves to life.

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OVERHAULED IN THE NIGHT

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CHAPTER IX

Lady Jane's Dhow

Written by Lieutenant Peter Harrison, R.N.

After we had sunk that dhow, buried Roberts, and borrowed three men from the *Harold* before she steamed away for Muscat with our wounded men, Lady Jane and I pulled inshore to smoother water and lay there in our two cutters for a couple of days until the *kaus* veered to the south'ard, on the usual third day, and forced us to take shelter in the mouth of Sirik creek. Next morning, the gale having blown itself out, Lady Jane sailed down to Bungi, and I carried on the ordinary routine, with never a dhow to search, until the *Harold* came back in her coat of new paint, bringing two weeks' mails, some bread, and four fresh hands to complete the cutter's crew.

Sammy Dodington had sent me Stubbs, a loquacious, argumentative, plump petty officer—the Captain of the quarterdeck men—who was not much good at that job, and still less use in a boat. With him came two young ordinary seamen, Holmes and Dobson, and a stoker, a quiet, retiring kind of chap named Perrin, who had no previous experience of boat work and seemed very keen to learn. He brought along a canvas

roll of tools and spent his spare time—and he had plenty of it—rummaging round to find something to repair — from the boat's cooking-stove to a worn awning stay. We usually coiled up and had a couple of hours " shut eye " after our midday meal, if there was nothing to do; but Perrin never did so. He'd sit in the bows, perfectly happy, doing some quiet job—resplicing a grummet or mending somebody's torn clothes. He and O'Leary were great pals, and I was very glad to have him in the cutter.

We had heard Simmonds, the signalman, tell the story of his night adventures so many times that we began to grow rather tired of it. Although never the sign of a native had he seen, he spun a mighty long-winded yarn. While he paddled across to the shore, " his heart kept a-jumping in his mouth "; it nearly jumped out of it when he heard the first rifle shot fired at us; he had " to swallow it " when the boat touched ground in the dark, and when he thought he had lost his way across the sandhills " it fair stopped beating ". As for the morning when he sighted the *Harold* and feared she would pass without noticing him waving, his heart " went to his feet ", and there it apparently " froze ".

I had to tell him that if his heart was so bad and movable as all that, I would send him back to the Staff Surgeon as soon as the *Apollo* came along. This stopped him until the four new hands joined, when each of them—and of course all of us—had to hear the yarn again.

Much to the delight of Reuben Wiggs, the *Harold* filled up his Maxim belt-box, and when she went away

up towards Lingah we soon settled down, read our letters and the newspapers the *Apollo* had sent us, until we almost knew them by heart. The *Times* lasted longest—the back page with pictures of houses for sale. The men made a game of pretending which they would buy if they ever got enough prize money—and what they would do with it. They invented fairy tales of why the people wanted to sell them, and they wondered if any of them had a " pub " handy. The trees and fields in these pictures reminded them of England—of Devon, Dorset, Kent, and Hampshire; and the Londoners would argue against the others. It gave them hours of amusement.

The only one who never played the game was O'Leary. The queer chap seemed to take little interest in anything except his job; never a letter did he receive, and never did he seem to expect one.

We talked of the coming expedition a hundred and fifty miles farther along the coast, past Bungi and Jask, and wished that we were going to land with it. During the next week we searched two dhows and twice pulled up to Sirik to fill our freshwater barricos. On each occasion my old friend the Wali seemed more than usually unhappy, very much afraid that the Derya Begi still believed that he had been mixed up in that last business when Roberts had been killed.

We were thoroughly happy and did not care how long the *Apollo* stayed away; none of us wanted to go back to her yet awhile—none of us except Stubbs, who missed the stews and potato pies of his own mess.

Then another blustering *kaus* gale forced me to shelter in the mouth of Sirik creek, and I hoped that

Lady Jane would not get into trouble down at Bungi. He had Jones, our best petty officer, in his boat to " mother " him, so should be quite safe.

On the morning of the second day of the gale we saw the *Harold* steaming past towards Bungi, making very heavy weather in the head sea, and wondered what news her wireless had picked up to send her down there.

" That 'Airy 'Onourable is a-washing down 'is deck—not 'arf," I heard the men say as they watched her disappear down the coast, a mass of spray.

Three hours before sunset she came hurrying back towing Lady Jane's empty cutter and signalling to me, as she came towards us, to pull out to her. I went alongside and climbed on board as she anchored.

Lady Jane met me—very dishevelled and very excited, too excited to say anything except " We've had a scrap; I've had two men killed; ask Crawford ".

The *Harold's* men had on their boots, gaiters, and leather gear, and then my pal Jimmy came down from the wheel-deck looking, for once, very serious. " There's a big dhow—a Turk—on shore the other side of Bungi, and she got her rifles ashore. The sea is too bad for me to land, and there are too many Afghans about. Somebody has made a ' bloomer ' and let her slip through. The Flagship and the *Apollo* —everybody—has been making rude signals—the Admiral is in a devil of a temper—and we have to land and try and cut them off at Sarzeh."

He held out a signal. " Read that!"

" *Apollo* to *Harold*. Land at Sirik with every available man from *Harold* and cutters and seize fort

Sarzeh. Will land and support you to-morrow."

"Look here, Peter, it's a rotten job!" he said angrily. "You get along up to Sirik as quickly as you can; the Sub and six of my chaps will go with you. Run your boat up the beach anywhere, it does not matter. Send for the Wali; frighten him; make him shut all his people in the fort to prevent them giving the show away, and don't let a soul get inland. I'll be after you in half an hour."

In ten minutes I was dashing back again, pulling twelve oars with my extra hands and splashing through the creek.

Lady Jane, sitting alongside me, had time to talk.

"I've lost two men killed," he kept on saying, "and I didn't do any good. I'd have lost them all but for Crawford. We got in a horrid mess. I didn't know what to do, and I lost two men; one was killed next to me. There were hundreds of chaps firing at me; they fired from the dhow as well as from the shore. I was sheltering under Proserpine Rock—I saw her coming—she had lost her foremast—she tried to make Bungi creek—missed it and ran ashore. I pulled down to her—it took us two hours against the head sea—and she fired at us directly I got near her. I made for her, plugging away with the Maxim, but in the big seaway that didn't do any good. I couldn't get alongside, either, the sea was too heavy, and one of my chaps was killed, Evans, the stoker who mended our boots on board. Men came down the beach and began firing; another man, Matthews, the signalman, was killed, and the men lost stroke; we got broadside on, bumped the sand, and were nearly swamped. I

managed to get her out, full of water, baled her, and lay off till I'd fired all my Maxim ammunition to try and stop them getting the rifles ashore. It didn't do any good; we saw them throwing the bundles out and dragging them up the beach. Then the *Harold* came along. I've never been under heavy fire before; it's horrid, perfectly beastly, sitting in a boat, not being able to do anything. It's worse still for the men pulling at the oars, with their backs to it, not seeing or knowing anything."

Poor Lady Jane; he seemed terribly upset—his face drawn and haggard, his long hair, which he usually stuck so smoothly over his head, hanging down like a mop. His shirt had lost its buttons, his neck was bare, and he'd lost his helmet.

We dashed up that creek and up to Sirik at racing speed. Seeing us coming along so fast, the fishermen crowded on the beach, and as I ran the cutter up it the Wali came down, looking frightened.

Lady Jane and the six *Harold* men jumped ashore.

" Get behind the village; don't let anyone get away inland; shoot if necessary," I yelled to him as they ran up towards the fort, scattering the fishermen.

I made Adolphus tell the Wali to send every man, woman, and child into the fort, and I drew my revolver to show him that I was in earnest.

" Tell him to do it quickly—quickly; tell him to stay close to me; I'll shoot him if he tries to get away; tell him I'll shoot anyone outside the fort after dark!"

The wretched Wali simply screamed orders, and the scared villagers ran off to collect their families.

Living, as they always did, in constant fear of raids

from the hills, they were used to taking refuge hurriedly in the fort. In five minutes the women and children, carrying their cooking-gear and water-jars, began streaming from the huts.

My own chaps hurriedly put on their socks, boots, and leather gear, packed some biscuit in their haversacks, and filled their water-bottles. Then I sent them to search the huts.

In half an hour, just as it began to get dark, every soul was inside the fort. Of course I knew why we had to dash inland and seize this fort Sarzeh. A camel caravan starting from Bungi or Sirik can only reach the interior by passing through the same gorge in the first line of hills, the gorge through which the river Gaz rushes down into the sea in the wet season and trickles down at other times; at the other end of the gorge stood this fort.

The track from Bungi and the track from Sirik meet where the Sirik track crosses the river, and at this point Bungi is ten miles away and Sirik only five. If you started a pack camel from Bungi, a pack camel starting from Sirik two and a half hours later would just about meet it there. I had a vague idea that the Sirdar, or Governor, of this part of the coast used to control the caravan route from it some years ago, but did not know more than that.

It was quite dark by the time my pal Jimmy came inshore with Lady Jane's crowded cutter and beached her alongside mine. He got his men ashore quickly. His very smart Gunner had come with him to take both the cutters back to the *Harold* with a scratch crew of two seamen, four lascar stokers, and three

native cooks; but it blew so hard outside that Jimmy gave him two more seamen.

This reduced our little landing-party to three officers, twenty-two seamen, stokers, and marines, the four lascars to carry the *Harold's* Maxim, Adolphus, the Baluchi interpreter, and Jimmy's chaukra. This young rascal had smuggled himself ashore against orders, hidden himself under a thwart, and only joined us when we marched away. He did not mind in the least when my pal swore at him.

"Master Sahib go; chaukra go," he said, as if that settled the matter between them.

"The little bully," I heard Jimmy chuckle.

We left Lady Jane and his own men to prevent any villager leaving the fort during the next half-hour, after which they were to follow us with another guide. We took the very frightened Wali along with us and hurried along the smooth sandy track inland, winding through the palm groves behind the village with the gale making a good deal of noise through the swaying trees. Pitch dark it was; but the Wali knew the way like a cat; he must have been over it a thousand times. I had the job of bringing up the rear—a most irritating job in the dark—and we had to call a halt several times to collect ourselves and give the thin-legged lascars with the Maxim a breathing space. The gun and its trestle-mounting may have been fairly easy to carry in the day-time; they were anything but easy to carry at night.

We did the five miles to the river in a couple of hours, and as soon as the soft track changed from sand to pebbles and clay we halted to wait for Lady

Jane. Jimmy and I groped our way across the dry bed of the river until we reached the edge of the stream, then waded across to the other side of the bare bed, and knew that we were standing on the track from Bungi—coming from the right.

Having found that the stream could be forded easily, we were going back when, away to the left, we heard a man's shout—an angry shout, listened and heard more—coming towards us.

We threw ourselves down flat, close to the edge of the stream, and waited. Stones and pebbles rattled and scrunched, the regular scrunching noise of heavy feet pressing them down. The noises came nearer, men cried out encouragingly, and we made out the dark bulky shape of a camel. Another and another followed, until we counted twenty-two or twenty-four. The wind brought back the noises for a few minutes; no more camels came along, and we waded back across the stream. Those camels were being urged along at their best pace; the continual shouting of the men with them made that certain, and we knew that they were being hurried down to Bungi to bring back the rifles landed from the Turkish dhow that morning.

My pal seemed highly delighted, but would not hear of my suggestion that if we took the men over, spread them out across the river bed, and waited for the caravan to come back, we should make certain of capturing them.

"The *Apollo* told me to go to Sarzeh, and going there I am," and he banged me on the back and said we were in for a high old picnic.

We should have been wiser if we had stayed in this place.

Lady Jane came up in a few minutes, and while his men took a " breather " we told him about the caravan.

Then we ordered the Wali to lead us to Sarzeh. The poor wretch nearly collapsed when he realized where he had to go; he whined: " Sarzeh bad place —bad place in dark—many evil spirits—very many men killed in Sarzeh." Lady Jane's guide seemed to be in a blue funk too, and we had almost to carry them along.

We got everybody across to the other side of the bed of the river, turned to the left, and started along it. The going was now perfectly beastly in the dark; there might have been a smoother track, but, so as not to lose each other, we had to keep close to the edge of the stream, and we scrambled along, slipping and stumbling, hitting our feet against stones and barking our shins.

The wretched lascars had a still more rotten time with that Maxim and let it fall twice in the first ten minutes. They had scarcely been out of the *Harold* for six months, so were, in any case, weak in the legs. Now they kept us back so much that we had to make our own chaps carry the Maxim. During one of our halts I found myself alongside Jones, Lady Jane's petty officer.

" Had a nasty time this morning?" I asked.

" Very bad, sir; very bad indeed "—and he gave me his account of it. From what he told me I gathered that Lady Jane had kept his head under fire in the heavy sea.

"He's a-settling down to the job all right, sir; a bit too much of the fine gen'l'man at first; but not much of that left now, sir." Both stoker Evans—who had often mended my boots—and Matthews, the signalman, had been killed instantly.

Each time we halted and made certain that no one had fallen out we made a good deal of noise, and if another caravan had come along I don't know what would have happened, because in the dark it was quite impossible to distinguish anybody or anything. It had taken us two hours to cover the five miles to the river, and it took us another two hours to scramble along the mile and a half or two miles of the bed of the river. We eventually left it, to our great relief, and reached fairly even ground. Presently the gale blew more strongly across us, so I knew that we had passed through the gorge in the hills, and after turning and twisting until I imagined that the Wali had started some of his hanky-panky tricks, we got on to the side of an exposed hill. We had another halt, another counting of the men, and Jimmy passed the word for me.

I groped my way to him, the Wali, and Adolphus.

"Sarzeh up there—very near—throw stone—can hit fort—Wali say not know if men in fort—no men in fort yesterday—not know any more—fort many evil spirits—in dark," Adolphus, quaking with fear, managed to tell me.

Jimmy and I had a yarn; there was only one thing to be done—to chance the fort being empty. But when we turned to tell the Wali to lead on we could not find him. A moment before he had been alongside

me—now he'd vanished, and we could find neither him nor the other guide. It sounds simple enough; but you try the job, in pitch darkness, on the side of a hill, and not daring to call out, of making certain that two particular men out of twenty-eight are not there.

They were not. We naturally thought that they had slipped up to the fort to give the alarm, so bundled ourselves away to the left. If any Afghans did happen to be there and tried to rush us, the old Wali would have to find us first. You may bet your life there were no stragglers in our little party just then. Adolphus, chattering with fright, kept hold of my shirt, for fear of being lost.

We waited, waited for nearly half an hour—a very trying time.

Nothing happened.

"We can't stick here the whole blessed night," Jimmy blurted out. "Let's shove along and find out for ourselves."

"Master Sahib," we heard a little voice. "Me go —Afghans no see me—no make noise," and without waiting for permission the chaukra slipped off his turban and white clothes, pushed them into my hands—we could scarcely see his brown body as he stood between us—and darted away up hill.

We passed the word that he had gone off to reconnoitre, and made the men spread out so that he should not miss us on the way back.

I think that just then my pal felt that we'd been sent on this job and didn't exactly know what good could come of it. The Wali might have led us anywhere; we might be miles from the fort, for all we

knew. I heard him muttering and cursing, and then he barked out: "Get along to your men; tell the Sub to bring his, and we'll shove up the hill. I'm not going to let that little chap do all the dirty work, and I'm hanged if I'm going to keep quiet any longer."

He roared out as I left him: "Come along, you chaps; that rotten fort is up topsides, somewhere. Get along, make as much noise as you like, and look out for the chaukra."

We started scrambling up; the men began halloing —I shook off Adolphus, who screamed in terror and tried to grab me again, twisted round some bushes, found myself out of the wind, stumbled over a heap of stones or something, and felt a wall. O'Leary and others rushed up, and we were wondering whether to turn to the left or right when we saw a red-hot stick being waved close to us and heard the chaukra's shrill voice.

"No men! no Afghans!" he cried, wild with excitement. I shouted "This way! this way!" as everyone came panting and cheering towards the sparks.

We followed the chaukra into a dark gap through which the wind whistled, but lost him for a moment; then a glow burst out, and we saw him stirring a heap of red-hot ashes. We were there like a shot—poking at those ashes to let the wind into them; throwing on brushwood which lay all round the ground until we had a blaze.

Jimmy roared out, "Here we are, lads!" as we gathered round it. Flames shooting up showed four high walls all round us, with a tower at each corner.

"It's Sarzeh all right!" my pal bellowed. "Aren't

we a lot of blithering fools, skylarking round a bonfire—playing the goat?" and he dashed away towards the gap through which we had entered. Lady Jane and I followed him, and we found O'Leary, Petty Officer Jones, Reuben Wiggs, and two more of my chaps there.

" Thought as how t'would be safer like," O'Leary and Jones explained apologetically.

" Good chaps! good chaps!" Jimmy said, and called out for four more of his men to come across and guard it.

Then we had a look round.

The gap through which we had entered turned out to be a wide, arched gateway with wooden posts and iron hinges sticking out from them, but no doors and no means of closing it—the wall was perhaps six feet thick. My pal seemed in great spirits. " Those chaps with the camels made that fire, old sonny! They stopped here and cooked their food."

Jimmy had lost all idea of caution—or knew it didn't matter. I thought the fire would show above the walls and give us away, but he only rapped out: " Those chaps can't get back for another six hours. Let it alone—it's jolly comforting!"

Four towers we could see, three small ones and a much bigger square one, almost opposite the gateway. We went across to it and found a well, just beneath it, with raised brickwork; we dropped down a stone and heard a splash not very far below.

Then one of our men came running from the square tower in a great state of excitement. " Them Afghans have left all their gear inside there, sir!"

This tower had a wide opening at the base; we went in and found the whole ground a jumble of things. I got hold of something and dragged it into the light from the bonfire. It was a camel-net stuffed with fodder. Old Jimmy dragged out another, and Lady Jane brought out a goatskin water-bag and a roll of blankets. By the light coming in through the opening we saw a whole heap of them, and in one corner a long grass rope coiled up, with a goatskin bag secured to one end, evidently the well-rope.

We counted the fodder nets, twenty-six of them, which roughly tallied with the number of camels we had counted down by the ford; not enough camels to bring back all the rifles and ammunition a big dhow could carry.

My burly pal gave a whoop. "Sonny, I've got it! Here's their left-luggage room; they're certain to come back; they'll unload here, go off again for another load, and we'll nab the whole boiling lot."

"What about the Wali?" I asked doubtfully. "He'll give the show away."

"Bother the Wali! He'll scoot back to Sirik and hide in his fort. You may bet your boots on that."

I did not feel so certain. I knew my old friend pretty well! "Hunt with the hounds and run with the hare" was his motto in life. He had guided us here, to keep in with us; he was just as likely to send a messenger to Bungi and tell them we were here, to keep in with the Afghans.

By the light coming through the doorway we made out some brick steps against the inner side of the wall of the tower, leading upwards to a dark hole above.

The chaukra darted up it, called down, and we followed him on to an uneven floor with the light of the fire coming through some narrow slits in the walls—a great barn of a place. Another flight of steps took us out into the gale and the top of the tower, perhaps thirty feet across, with a low parapet all round it. We looked down on the courtyard. Some of the men were sitting round the bonfire smoking; others were pulling down what seemed to be a wooden platform running round the inside of the walls, and as they dragged bits of wood to throw on the flames their gigantic shadows moved about the walls. No wonder the Wali thought the place was haunted at night.

Down by the arched entrance, opposite us, we saw the men guarding it. As we felt our way down those steps into the courtyard my pal kept on saying: "That's the place for us—that's the place for us." We had a look at the other three towers, but they seemed to be more or less in decay, the ground inside them covered with debris. They all had steps winding up their walls, but no roofs, only platforms with the gale shrieking across them.

But for the raised well the courtyard seemed quite bare, no shelter or sheds along any of the gaunt walls.

We went across to the fire and saw that Perrin and the *Harold's* corporal of marines, Jenkins, were examining the Maxim.

"Anything the matter?" I asked.

"The cocking-lever don't exactly work proper," Jenkins told me. "It's had a bit of a banging about; what with being dropped and one thing and another."

We had a look at it and it seemed stiff.

" We'll put it right in the morning," Jimmy said cheerfully.

We squatted round the fire nibbling biscuit and tinned meat while Jimmy, looking like some wild man from Borneo with his beard and great hairy chest and arms, told me what he intended doing. " We'll get the Maxim up on top of that tower, get up it ourselves and lie ' doggo '. Even if the Wali has split on us, they'll want their gear, and they'll come along to see if we're here. They won't find us and will think we've cleared out. They'll plank the bundles of rifles down somewhere and start off again. It'll be daylight soon after, and I don't care what happens. We can hold out, up there, until the *Apollos* come—and we'll nab the whole lot."

He explained to the men exactly what he meant to do; explained that everything depended on keeping absolutely quiet when the caravan *did* come.

They were full of keenness. With old Jimmy to tell them what to do, that was all they wanted, I knew.

He gave us half an hour for food. Then we carried the Maxim and its belt-box to the top of the tower, left a couple of men to beat down the bonfire, and everyone else climbed up those two flights of steps and lay down.

We watched the two men smothering the flames; they came up to us through the smoke, and soon we were in absolute darkness again.

My own cutter's crew kept together—Stubbs, O'Leary, Simmonds, Wilkins, Reuben Wiggs, Perrin, Dobson, Holmes, and Brown. Jenkins and the two other marines from the *Harold* took charge of the

damaged Maxim; Lady Jane, Jimmy, and I squatted down with our backs to the parapet, to keep off the wind; the chaukra coiled himself up as close to his master's feet as he could; and two of the *Harold's* men were put on watch.

The rest of us tried to sleep.

That didn't turn out much of a success. Jimmy seemed as fresh as paint. He began telling us all about this deserted fort—how Mir Barkhat Khan lived here when he was Governor of the coast—that after he had escaped from the Derya Begi on board the *Persepolis* he had found another Governor appointed—how he'd gathered some Baluchis from the hills and sacked it, six months ago—how he had captured the Kalantar (or commandant) and burnt him alive—and how he only used it now as a "jumping-off" post when he wanted to raid a village on the coast or support a gun-running caravan.

"I expect that he roasted the wretched Kalantar down at that bonfire," Jimmy said.

He went on yarning, but I was dog-tired and dozed off.

I woke again; someone had prodded me. It was still pitch dark and the gale roared past us, but I felt that the men all round me were on the alert. I heard shouts coming out of the darkness—beyond the fort—answering shouts farther away—very faint—and Lady Jane whispered excitedly: "Someone came in through the gateway—stirred the bonfire—the man on watch is certain someone did, ten minutes ago."

My pal sent him crawling round to tell the men not to let their rifles or cutlasses clatter, and to keep still.

CHAPTER X

Mir Barkhat Khan

Written by Lieutenant Peter Harrison, R.N.

I peered over the parapet and looked down. A tiny glow showed; it grew bigger, and I saw a couple of dark figures staring at it. I heard the confused cries of men coming from beyond the walls. The fire quickly flared up as the gale caught the smouldering wood, showing up clearly the blank, reddish walls with their irregular edges and the dark shadows of the platform round them. Through the archway came the cloaked figure of a man tugging a frightened, unwilling camel, hauling at the rope till his neck straightened out. The loads slung on each side of the camel grated against the sides of the entrance, and then his great body came into the light and he tramped slowly across the courtyard towards our square tower. More followed, stalking across and swaying as they knelt down in rows at the foot of the tower, under our very noses. Twenty-three came in, all of them heavily laden. The men left them and hurried across to the fire, stirred and poked it, tore down pieces of the platform and threw them on it—just as our men had done. Very quickly they had a great roaring fire blazing—

flames ten feet high, and the smoke driving across the courtyard, sweeping through the archway, and over the top of that wall. There were not more than twenty men, and they did not trouble to look round the walls or the towers; some of them came over to our tower, dragged out a water-bag and took it across to the fire; and there they sat—Baluchis or Afghans—huddled in their cloaks with their rifles slung over their backs, absolutely unsuspecting any danger. So Jimmy had been right after all, and the Wali had *not* given us away.

The firelight was now so strong that I could see all our men on the top of the tower, raising themselves on their elbows and trying to peep over the crumbling two-foot parapet—the light on their excited faces.

Jimmy pulled me down, and I felt rather an ass as I lowered myself and made my men do the same. "They can see your face; it'll frighten 'em," Jimmy chuckled, and sent Lady Jane crawling round to his men to make them conceal themselves too. Reuben Wiggs wriggled with excitement, and I saw O'Leary pressing him down. It was intensely painful to lie there seeing nothing but the glow of the fire over the top of the parapet, occasionally getting a whiff of smoke when the gale whirled it in our direction. How long we lay like this I don't know; it seemed a precious long time! Then shouts of command came up to us; men began cursing the camels beneath us; we heard bundles falling to the ground, the angry noises of protesting camels being dragged and kicked to their feet, and more shouting of orders.

Simmonds, next to me, had found a crack in the

parapet. He whispered that the camels were being led out, and he rolled over to let me look. I looked through, saw men beating down the fire, and camel after camel lurching through the smoke and disappearing into the darkness outside the archway.

In a few minutes the shouting of the men was swallowed up in the noise of the wind.

The men began twisting their cramped bodies, their rifles and cutlasses rattling on the mud roof as they moved into more easy positions—it was terribly difficult to keep still. We gave them two minutes more; the courtyard seemed absolutely deserted, and then Jimmy, Lady Jane, and I felt our way, very gingerly, down those two flights of brick steps to the bottom of the tower. We stumbled against the rows of camel-loads lying outside. We felt them and felt the stocks and barrels of rifles under the canvas wrappings; we counted forty-two bundles, and if, as was usually the custom, twenty rifles went to a bundle, that meant more than eight hundred rifles!

We were very pleased with ourselves.

Jimmy sent six men over to guard the entrance, and O'Leary volunteered to go some way down the hill. He had been fidgeting round me, and I asked him what he wanted.

" Beg pardon, sir, but I'd like to do a bit of ' sentry go ' down there. Give the others more time if anything did come along."

We let him go, and he went off perfectly satisfied, taking stoker Perrin with him.

We started that fire again—an easy enough job—and soon had plenty of light. Even if the caravan

chaps saw the glare of it over the walls, they would think the wind had blown it into a blaze.

Jimmy set the men to work unlashing the bundles, cutting away the canvas, and burning both that and the rope. In half an hour the rifles lay scattered all over that side of the courtyard; most of them Mannlicher, others Lebel rifles.

Whatever happened—even if the *Apollos* came along—we could not carry them back to Sirik, so we set to work to make them useless, by throwing the breech-bolts down the well.

Lady Jane had a brain-wave; he suggested that we should stick a foot or more of the rifle-barrels in the bonfire, and when they were red-hot bang them on the ground until they bent.

" Great lad! great lad!" Jimmy roared. " Splendid!"

What with the canvas and rope of the bundles and plenty of wood from that platform, we quickly had a roaring fire and started doing this, sticking a dozen in at a time. We found a better scheme than banging them on the ground. We shoved the red-hot barrel into a crack between one of the big gate posts and the wall, and levered it round until it bent. To prevent the wood burning we stuck another rifle-barrel alongside it to take the strain and the heat. This worked splendidly, and the men knew well enough that no rifle-barrel, once bent, could ever be straightened again usefully, so you can imagine how they worked. As we bent a rifle we threw it on the fire until the wooden stocks burned, and as they were soaked in grease they burned easily but filled the courtyard with thick oily smoke. Several of the men, in their excitement, burned

their hands rather badly, and one or two burned holes in their boots by standing on the heated barrels which strewed the ground near the fire. We had started to do this about half-past four, and by the time it was light enough to see ourselves—black as niggers with that oily smoke—we had destroyed some sixty or seventy rifles.

As soon as it was daylight the three of us went outside the fort to look round. We did not expect the caravan to come back until the afternoon, and we had put Simmonds up on top of the square tower to keep a lookout, so there was no necessity for concealment. The little chaukra came with us, sticking to " Master Sahib " like a fox terrier and carrying a haversack with his smoking-gear. I smiled when I saw that he had a big butcher's knife stuck in his belt. We found O'Leary and Perrin, half-way down the slope, close to some mud huts (" Nobody in 'em, sir; we've hunted through 'em all "), sent them back to get some food and go on destroying rifles, and walked all round the walls of the fort. The drawing[1] gives a better idea of what that fort looked like than any description. The whole place crumbled with age and neglect; even the square tower on top of which we had spent most of the night leant at an angle, and had a crack in one side from top to bottom. All round the foot of the walls were piles of fallen bricks crumbling into mud, stones and sand lying in mounds so high that the gaps from which they had fallen could be scaled easily in half a dozen places.

The square tower itself stood on the brink of a

[1] See page 171.

small quarry from which the stones to build it had evidently been obtained, and this made approach to it difficult; but the other towers, except the one at the opposite angle to the square tower, were so dilapidated that anybody could climb up and into them.

On the drawing the caravan track is shown coming out through the hills from Bungi and Sirik and winding round the foot of the little hill on which the fort stood. Actually, from the hill itself we could not distinguish it, and when we went down the path past those few deserted huts we only found it by the pad marks of camels, and took some time to do that—not being practised at the job.

From where we stood the greyish-black smoke of the bonfire swept over the side wall to the north-west, and must have been visible for miles.

We didn't stay there for long and walked up again, the three most disreputable-looking naval officers you could possibly imagine—black as a hat with the oily smoke, our shirts and shorts black, and our shins scratched and bloodstained as the result of our scrambling through that river bed. If he had seen himself a month ago as he now appeared, Lady Jane would have coiled up and given up the ghost; but though he looked pretty well played out he was full of grit, and seemed an altogether different chap from the beautifully dressed Sub we had known on board the *Apollo*. He had learned, somehow, not to ask unnecessary questions—a great step in his education.

A quarter of an hour's stand easy while we had some food, and then we carried on destroying rifles. That was our one idea, and we hoped to destroy

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VERY QUICKLY THEY HAD A GREAT ROARING FIRE

most of them before that caravan came back with more. What would happen then didn't bother us, and though we knew that this beastly gale might delay the *Apollo's* people getting on shore, we expected them sooner or later that day.

At any rate, we did not worry, not even when Perrin reported that the cocking-lever of the Maxim had been so badly bent that the gun could not be fired. He thought he might be able to put it right, and we told him to try. " I've brought along my roll of tools, sir, in my haversack, and I'd like to have a go at it."

We had destroyed perhaps a hundred and thirty rifles when Simmonds, the signalman on top of the square tower, called out excitedly, pointing away inland.

Everyone stopped working and looked up at him.

Jimmy and I ran into the tower and on to the roof.

" Look over there, sir!"

We followed his hand and made out a cloud of dust behind the shoulder of a hill six or seven miles away to the south-east. We saw it moving steadily towards the plain at our feet, and watching through our glasses we presently distinguished a slowly advancing group of horsemen. More followed—a long ragged column showing dark against the bluish-grey surface of the plain; it stretched for half a mile.

We lay down behind the parapet, made Simmonds lie down, and watched them.

" How many?" Crawford asked me.

" Three or four hundred," I said, and the rear of the column had not yet come in sight. He grunted

and made a grimace. "We're up agin it, my lad! I bet that's some of Barkhat Khan's crowd. Confound that Maxim!"

"Plenty good fight, Sahib?" the chaukra asked, his eyes sparkling.

"Too much 'plenty good fight'," Jimmy said soberly.

We crawled to the hole in the roof and climbed down into the courtyard. Jimmy had quite recovered his spirits.

He shouted to the men: "A lot of Afghans are coming along; we'll keep 'em out till the *Apollos* get here; I'm going to hang on here till we've 'done in' those rifles."

We hurriedly tried to work out a plan of defence. We set all the men to make a barricade across the arched entrance with all the fodder nets and things inside the square tower, with the crumbling heaps of bricks outside and inside the walls, the wood they tore down from the platforms, and the bent rifle-barrels—anything they could lay their hands on.

If we could have relied on the Maxim, it would have been different. Perrin still worked at it, and we told him to do his best. We should have to rely on our twenty-two rifles, and the top of the square tower must be our main help. It overlooked all the other towers and the crumbling walls; rifle fire from it could sweep the courtyard and the archway, could sweep the outside of the two walls of the angle in which it stood, but not, of course, the outside of the other two walls. We went across to the tower diagonally opposite to it. Its platform seemed less rotten

than those of the other two small towers, and we scrambled up the crumbling brick-and-mud steps which led to it. There were several gaps in the brickwork, and climbing over them we dislodged more bricks but drew ourselves up on the platform. It bent and creaked unpleasantly under our weight and had lost many planks, but gave room for ten or twelve men who could kneel or lie and fire over a very ragged, crumbling parapet. From there rifles could fire along the outside of the wall with the arched entrance, and would help to keep back a rush and prevent anyone pulling down the barricade our men were piling up across it.

We scrambled down again, digging our fingers into the brickwork of the wall to take the weight off the rotten steps.

"Well, Peter," Jimmy blurted out cheerfully, "you will have to get your men up there, six of them —that platform won't stand more—and do what you can. The rest of us will take the square tower."

Simmonds had to stay with my pal; Wilkins was much too excitable for a job like this, and Perrin had to try and repair the Maxim. So I told the others exactly what they had to do when the time came, and took their rifles up to that platform myself.

The excited chaukra and the trembling Adolphus began filling our water-bottles from the well; although the rifle-bolts we had thrown down it had already made the water oily, it *was* water—and we might need it badly.

Jimmy and I went up to the top of the square tower and watched the crowd of Afghans—or Baluchis—

approaching. The nearest were now about two miles away, coming along the ordinary caravan route, or so we imagined. Behind the horsemen followed a large number of men on foot, all of them with rifles slung over their shoulders, and bringing up the rear tramped a long train of led camels.

They came on slowly, trailing across the plain, their horses hanging down their heads wearily, as though they had been marching all night.

Jimmy told me to take my chaps up the tower and only fire if anyone approached the barricade. This was now nearly five feet high and would stop a rush, but could as easily be pulled down as it had been piled up. A mounted man could look over it and see the heaps of rifles lying at the foot of the square tower, and I had to prevent anyone doing so—if I could.

We got up there and stowed ourselves as close to the parapet as possible to give the platform less strain; every time one of us shifted near the edge, away from the wall, it bent and sagged down unpleasantly. The men started scraping away the parapet to make loop-holes; down in the courtyard Lady Jane's men put the finishing touches to the barricade while the rest "cooked" our captured rifles—every half-dozen destroyed helped. I saw stoker Perrin come down from the square tower and go across to the bonfire, saw him push something into the hottest part of it, and stay there.

Through a crack in the parapet I kept my glasses fixed on the leading twenty or thirty horsemen. They kept turning their faces upwards towards the fort, probably puzzled at the sight of smoke drifting over

the walls. Even then I thought that they might pass the fort altogether and go on to Bungi and leave us to destroy the remainder of the rifles in peace. They didn't leave me long in doubt. Half a dozen broke away from the others and came trotting up the path, and when they were close enough to catch sight of the barricade across the entrance they reined in their horses and began talking and pointing. Then they came on again, unslinging their rifles.

My chaps started to wriggle into position on either side of me, the platform creaking under them, and I told them to stand by to fire; but the horsemen caught sight of their rifle-barrels sticking out, wheeled round, and galloped back down the hill.

"Don't shoot!" I told them, and sent Reuben Wiggs, the lightest of my chaps, to tell Jimmy what had happened.

The whole cavalcade and caravans came to a full stop when those few men had galloped back to them; they clustered in groups, men riding from group to group.

Presently they began to draw away from each other, spreading round the base of the hill; then they beat their horses into a gallop and began wheeling and twisting, charging a little way, wheeling and dashing back, never nearer than five hundred yards, yelling and firing their rifles in the air. They did this for quite half an hour. They only wanted to draw our fire, to discover how many of us were here, and they must have been disappointed when we never fired a shot. They went back again to the caravan track and sent the dismounted men up to those deserted mud

huts. From there they kept popping their heads over the low walls or popping round a corner, firing wildly and popping back. Some bullets did come our way, but only by chance, I imagine; and so long as we kept down below our parapet we were quite safe. My chaps didn't fire a shot; they wanted to take pot-shots at those fellows popping in and out, but we could not afford to waste ammunition, and I would not let them do so.

Our silence must have made those Afghans or Baluchis still more uncertain what to do. At length the horsemen divided into three groups; two of them wheeled away towards the sides and back of the fort, and then the third—some forty or sixty men—let out a howl and came straight up the path, beating their wretched horses into a gallop again and firing their rifles. They came thundering along, making straight for the barricaded archway, and looked as though they did mean business. I yelled down into the courtyard to warn Jimmy, and I yelled to my men to open fire, and some of them had to raise their heads and shoulders over the parapet to use their rifles. They must then have been seen, for the yelling burst out more fiercely and rifle bullets came round us, cracking against the parapet. I heard one of my chaps give a yelp, but had no time to see what had happened. O'Leary, alongside me, pulled his bolt backwards and forwards like clockwork, firing steadily; so did some of the others; but Reuben Wiggs and Holmes scarcely looked along their sights. I seized Reuben's rifle and tried to fire it—it was empty—I yelled for a fresh clip—jammed it in—fired into the mob—yelled for another, and

emptied that. We knocked over a good many, and then most of them wheeled round and galloped away, but some twenty dashed right up to the barricade, where only two of my rifles could get at them. But there they got a volley from the rest of our chaps, who had evidently picked up their rifles and manned the barricade, and they galloped downhill again a good deal faster than they had come up.

I stopped my men firing, looked round, and found that Dobson, the new ordinary seaman, had got a bullet through his shoulder, and looked ghastly white lying on his back and holding his shoulder. He didn't seem to be bleeding, so I left him there, taking his rifle and bandolier and giving back Reuben his own.

Firing had died down, except from the huts, and all the horsemen had gathered together again on the caravan track. On the path lay several dead horses and men, and two wounded men crawled down it.

It was nearly eleven o'clock.

The chaukra put his head above the platform. "Master Sahib want!" he cried excitedly, so I scrambled down the steps and found old Jimmy waiting for me. He took me along to the barricade and we looked over. Three dead men and a dead horse lay underneath it.

"That'll teach 'em a lesson," he said gleefully; "if I know anything about those chaps, they won't try that little game on again. The worst of it is that some of them must have seen all those rifles over there. Well, I'm jiggered if they're going to collar them."

He held out his great hairy fist to the chaukra for a

match, lighted his pipe, and told me to send my wounded man across to the square tower. We had left our first-aid bag there, and someone would stick on a bandage.

" If Barkhat Khan himself is down there," he went on, " he won't waste much time." He puffed at his pipe and sang out to his men: " Go on cooking rifles, lads! The more the merrier." An extraordinary chap he was—an extraordinary chap in every way—and I felt extremely glad that he had the job of getting us out of this mess and not I myself.

Even with two hands, as you know, it was difficult enough to climb down from that rotten platform of mine. Dobson now had only one to use and couldn't do it; nor could he get on his feet because of the bullets flying over the top of the parapet; so the men next to him had to help push and drag him along the platform to the top of the steps. They had to bunch together to do that, and their weight made that part of the platform under them give way. Two of them managed to hang on to him and keep him from falling, but the fat petty officer Stubbs was not so lucky. He came half sliding, half falling to the ground in a cloud of brick-dust and fell with a bump at my feet on the piles of debris there. Luckily he was only bruised and shaken, and he sat up, feeling himself to find out what was broken. I sent across for the well-rope, and we lowered Dobson with that round his waist to steady him. He walked across to the square tower, grinning at the others and holding his left arm across his chest.

Old Jimmy came across to find out what had

happened. I told him that the platform would not stand the strain much longer.

"You'll have to stick there like flies—bluebottles!" he grinned as I clawed my way up.

Down below in the plain the caravan of camels huddled together on the track, perhaps a mile away, the armed men gathered in an excited mob. Presently a mounted man came prancing towards us holding up a rifle with a white cloth tied to it.

I sang down to my pal and told him.

"I'll go along and have a yarn," he shouted back; "keep your chaps handy."

In a minute he had climbed the barricade and was outside, dragging Adolphus with him and followed by the chaukra. He waved his helmet (it *had* been white once) and went to meet the man, who had now dismounted and was coming up to him on foot, salaaming gravely. I couldn't help smiling when old Jimmy stuck out his fist and shook the perplexed chap's hand—a fine looking chap—a head taller than my pal—thin and wiry.

"That's the chap we caught down at Sirik, sir," O'Leary whispered.

I looked through my glasses, but his face was almost hidden in his lungi, and I did not recognize him. I handed them to O'Leary.

"Yes, sir! I'll bet my last dollar it's the same chap."

If it was Mir Barkhat Khan, he evidently wanted to look over the barricade and see for himself what was inside. It was as good as a play to watch my pal manœuvring him so that he could not, and the tiny

chaukra, looking from one to the other, not knowing which to admire most.

I saw the man waving his hands towards where the sea lay, saw my pal shake his head, and then Mir Barkhat Khan—if it was he—salaamed again. They shook hands, and getting on his horse he walked it down the hill.

In a minute or two Jimmy came inside my tower and bellowed up: " That *was* Barkhat Khan—the chap himself; they *did* see all those rifles, and he'll let us get back to the sea if we give them up. I told him he'd have to come and take them; he said he would. Stout fellow! Fine chap!"

" Did you ask him how that son of his was getting on?" I sang down.

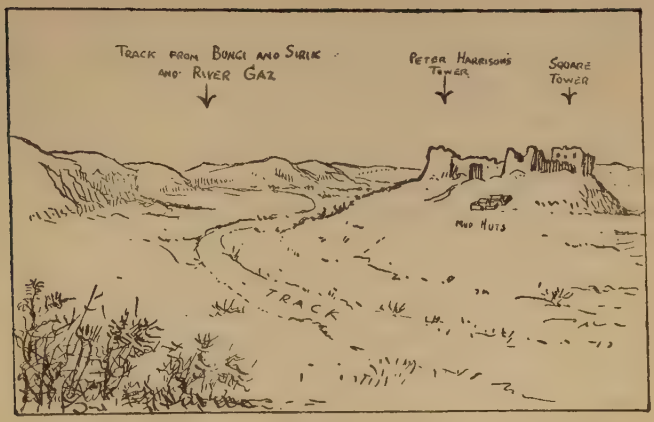
" What! that boy I told you about—the chap with the rotten appendix? No, I forgot about him. I'll ask him next time he drops in for tea.

" How's the old platform?" he called up before he went away.

My chaps grinned and told each other that " they weren't going to let 'em 'ave them rifles; 'e wouldn't get 'em, neither; not if the 'Airy 'Onourable didn't want 'em to; they'd stick it out all right till the '*Pollos* came along."

Stubbs looked none too happy—his fall had shaken him badly; Reuben Wiggs called out plaintively: " If I'd only got me Maxim, I'd show 'em summat; I'd show 'em what's what, that I would."

I wondered how Perrin was getting on with the *Harold's* Maxim and if he would repair it.



Sarzeh

CHAPTER XI

Attacked in Sarzeh

Written by Lieutenant Peter Harrison, R.N.

As soon as Mir Barkhat Khan had ridden down to his men I saw some of them canter towards the camels. In a very short while the whole caravan got under way and commenced coming towards the fort, but then turned away from the track and made a wide sweep out of rifle range. I watched the camels—some fifty or sixty of them—until they rejoined the track a couple of miles to the right, just where it joined the river and commenced to go through the hills towards Bungi and Sirik. I watched them until they disappeared round the shoulder of a hill at the mouth of the gorge.

Great activity now showed amongst the horsemen below us. They all dismounted, and many men came streaming up behind the huts; others spread out round the base of the hill and began climbing up towards the fort very slowly.

As I wriggled round the platform to warn Jimmy, another plank gave way under me. I looked down into the courtyard and saw Lady Jane, petty officer Jones and his cutter's crew lining the barricade, resting their rifles on it. Jimmy and the rest of our people had gone up to the top of the square tower, so he evidently realized that things were going to happen at last!

Stoker Perrin squatted by the side of the bonfire, beating at something with one of the "cooked" rifle-barrels—that bent cocking-lever, I imagined—and I hoped that he was not wasting his time.

Then things *did* happen! Everybody began firing; the Baluchis—or whoever they were—dodged up the hill from bush to bush, throwing themselves down, firing, crawling up a few yards, yelling, and keeping under cover. We must have knocked over a few, but there were so many of them it seemed to make no difference. They first of all seemed to be making for the gateway, collecting again behind the huts, and I had given my men orders to fire at these when, away to the left, a whole horde of them dashed for the broken-down tower on the other side of the archway, and I couldn't get at them—nor could Lady Jane from the barricade. The wall protected them from Jimmy's lot, and, looking along it, I saw several of them actually climbing into the gaps on the top;

others had got into the tower itself and were firing across the courtyard. Jimmy's men fired at them and stopped them for a minute, and my own chaps came wriggling along the platform to shoot at them too. I saw Perrin—still by the bonfire—look over his shoulder and go on hammering—hammering furiously. Then more men began climbing over the gaps in the wall.

My chaps were all round me, lying down, kneeling on each other, firing as fast as they could. I felt the platform giving; there was a splintering underneath us, a supporting beam levered up the rotten parapet over which I was firing, and then the whole thing collapsed. We hung for a moment, gripping the parapet and each other, and then slid and fell in a heap to the bottom of the tower. How it was we didn't break our arms and legs I don't know; I was more or less underneath, had all the wind knocked out of me, and a whack on the head which made me dizzy. We found ourselves scrambling to our feet, cursing, and getting the sand out of our eyes and hunting round for our rifles.

All that remained of the platform above us hung down; the men were looking at me for orders, and I yelled to them to come along, and yelled again because of a beastly sharp pain in my right side.

We dashed out into the courtyard; saw men tearing down the barricade, and Lady Jane's men firing at them and striking with their rifle-butts. We ran along to them, yelling, and helped to clear the barricade for a minute; but more men kept dropping over the gaps in the walls, and I heard Jimmy's huge bellowing

voice shout to us to get out of the way and get back to the square tower.

We bolted across.

As we passed the bonfire I yelled to Perrin to come along. He looked over his shoulder at some Afghans charging towards him, snatched something from the fire, and came after us. We turned round at the foot of the square tower—among the heaps of rifles—and fired back at them. Jimmy's men kept firing from the top of it, and those chaps bolted back into the small towers, where we could not get at them.

Jimmy bellowed again for us to come up to him; we climbed up, panting and blowing, and threw ourselves down among his men. I saw men pulling down the barricade, tearing it away with their hands. It crumbled before our eyes, and we could not prevent it, however quickly we fired.

As the barricade melted away a great noise of shouting and yelling started from beyond the walls, as though hundreds had gathered behind them, on either side of the archway. Jimmy roared out " Stand by!" and we expected to see a whole horde of chaps come rushing through it.

Lady Jane and his men scrambled down to the floor underneath to guard the steps, and we waited, bullets coming from the towers opposite, where we couldn't touch the fellows firing at us through cracks and slits in their walls.

That noise outside sounded just like the row made by a big football crowd—rising and falling—ceasing—then bursting out again. Barkhat Khan must have been haranguing them.

I still felt dazed and stupid from that fall and had a beastly pain each time I breathed; that noise got on my nerves.

Just behind me Perrin still kept on hammering something. "Can't you get that Maxim ready?" I asked him irritably; and you can imagine that I woke up when he called back: "Another five minutes, sir! It'll be ready in five minutes."

He sang out for someone to push over the ammunition box and for Jenkins to come and help him.

Jimmy, crawling along to me, bellowed out: "They'll get the surprise of their lives," and our chaps grinned happily.

The shouting beyond the wall grew fiercer, and then Perrin and Jenkins both cried out together: "Ready, sir!"

They asked if they could try a few rounds to see if the gun worked properly; Jimmy and I rolled out of the way; they shoved the muzzle over the parapet and fired a dozen shots at some men behind the parapet of the small tower opposite.

I have never heard such a pleasant sound as the rattle—tack—tack—tack—tack—of that Maxim, and the noise of the football crowd ceased suddenly and completely—simply "switched off".

We gave a howl of delight.

"I can cut through that parapet opposite, sir—get at those niggers in the tower," Jenkins said excitedly; but Jimmy wouldn't let him waste cartridges and told him to train the gun on the archway and stand by for a rush.

Every one of us, with our magazines charged and

clipfuls of cartridges lying handy, gripped our rifles, pointing them towards where the barricade had been, and waited.

No rush came, and to this day I do not know why. We naturally thought that the noise made by those first trial shots of the Maxim gave them " cold feet " —it must have been a horribly unexpected surprise. But I am certain that if only they had had sufficient courage and determination we could not have kept them out of our tower for long—Maxim or no Maxim.

Until we slowly realized that they did not mean to attack we clutched our rifles; then we gradually relaxed our grip, and I do believe that many of us—the men at any rate—felt keenly disappointed.

" Them '*Pollos* are a-coming along and they've seen 'em, p'raps; that's what's 'appened," I heard the men suggest. " Those Balooks are 'opping it, maybe."

From the top of the square tower where we lay the opposite walls of the fort shut out the view of the plain and the break in the hills through which the Bungi track ran. We could only see over them by standing on the parapet itself, and as we were still being sniped from the other towers we could not do this. So we could only hope that the *Apollos* were coming, and lie ready for a rush if the Baluchis did try one. We lay there for some long time, expecting every minute to hear the sound of distant firing and the noise of the *Apollo's* Maxim coming up wind. If anyone showed himself above the parapet or in one of the gaps, those chaps in the other towers sniped at him. Smack would come a bullet against the bricks,

and the dust would blow away in little puffs. O'Leary asked if he might try a few shots, and sniped back. The firing from the other tower, the one on the left of the archway just opposite, annoyed us most, coming through two narrow slits in the walls. O'Leary kept his sights on one of them, fired and shook his head, loaded and waited, fired and dodged his head down as a bullet struck the edge of the loophole he had scraped. He seemed to enjoy this, and I am certain that this was not the first time he had done it—not by a long chalk. He fired a third shot, and I saw a grim smile on his face as he picked up another cartridge.

"Got him that time, sir," he said as he caught my eye, and then turned his rifle on the other slit. Whether he had or not, sniping certainly died down from that tower, and soon afterwards we saw the men in the others climb through the broken-down gaps in their outer walls and disappear.

No sound of rifle or Maxim came from the direction of the Bungi track, and with our eyes fixed on the archway we could do nothing but wait for something to happen. This time of suspense tried us more than all the morning's work.

Down below us in the courtyard, at the foot of the wall opposite, lay several huddled bodies; two hung head downwards from gaps in the top of the wall they had climbed—one of them still clutched his rifle; between the wall and the bonfire several more sprawled where they had fallen when charging after us as Lady Jane and I dashed back to the square tower with our men. These lay, in all the horrid immobility of sudden

death, on top of the bent and burned rifles which strewed the ground.

Jimmy told me it was nearly two o'clock—twenty-one hours since we landed—and I do not suppose that any of us had had an hour's sleep or anything to eat except a bite of biscuit at daybreak. Even my pal began to fidget; he kept on saying: "I'll go along and find out what they are doing; I'll give them another ten minutes."

He got on his feet and stood on the parapet, looking through his glasses. One or two bullets cracked past him, and I made him take shelter again.

"I can't see anything!" he said as he lay down.

Then at last he shouted to the Sub to follow him with his six men, told me to be ready in case anything happened, and climbed down through the hole in the roof. Through my loophole I saw him, Lady Jane, and his six men running across the courtyard to the archway. Nobody fired at them (so the towers were empty of Baluchis), and we watched them creep round the sides of the archway and crawl away out of sight. In a couple of minutes we heard a few stray shots, and presently they came back again; Lady Jane and his men lay down just outside the archway, and Jimmy stalked through it and came up to the roof.

"We've had a look round, old chap. There's not a sign of the *Apollos*; those chaps have pushed off—most of 'em, at any rate; we saw a whole crowd of the mounted fellows going along the Bungi track; some poor devils down by the huts potted at us. We'll shove along and turn 'em out."

We left Dobson, Adolphus, the chaukra, and the

lascars on top of the tower while the rest of us climbed down into the courtyard and ran across to Lady Jane. Several bodies of dead Baluchis and Afghans lay just beyond, but many more must have been dragged away. I saw O'Leary running into the tower on the left, and he came running back. "I *did* get him, sir!" he said.

Jenkins and Perrin brought the Maxim with them and stood it on its trestle, and as Perrin had burnt his hands so badly that he could hardly use them, I told Reuben Wiggs to help them.

Jimmy left me there with Jenkins, Perrin, Wiggs, and Stubbs (still much shaken by his two falls), spread out the rest of the men on the outer side of the wall where there was a level space before the hill sloped down, and gave the order to dash for the huts. As they ran down the chaukra darted past me, after them, waving a curved dagger which he must have taken from one of the dead Baluchis. Shots came from the hut, and one of the *Harold's* men fell, scrambled to his feet, picked up his rifle, and followed after them.

Then Jenkins, with an oath, yelled, "Look out, sir!" and swinging the Maxim round, began firing along the right of the wall. I saw fifty or sixty men come crawling up the hill in that direction. They rose to their feet as they gained the level under the wall and came charging and yelling towards us. They were Afghans; no Baluchis would do this.

The Maxim bullets swept through them, but then the beastly thing jammed, Jenkins cursing and trying to make it work.

Perrin, Wiggs, Stubbs, and myself scrambled to our feet and emptied our magazines, but couldn't stop them. I'd got out my cutlass and revolver and thought my number was up, when I heard old Jimmy bellowing, "Get at 'em, lads!" and he and Lady Jane came charging back again with their men—just in time. They dropped three or four with rifle shots, and the rest turned and bounded down the hill out of sight among the bushes.

"That's a lucky escape, old chap!" Jimmy gasped, out of breath, as we all flung ourselves down to escape the bullets that came up from below. The *Harold's* wounded man crawled up to us and lay down holding his leg.

"It was!" If those Afghans had waited only another three minutes, waited until our fellows had got farther down the hill, they could have scuppered my little lot and cut off the others from the fort—got them in between two fires.

"Cunning chaps! Cunning chaps!" Jimmy kept on saying.

He pointed across the plain, and I saw a dark, slowly moving line of horsemen disappearing through the gap in the hills towards Bungi.

"The *Apollos must* have landed by this time," Jimmy said. "Those chaps will run into them—splendid!"

I feared that our Skipper would make a mess of the business, and my pal evidently thought that too.

"I hope he sends Sammy Dodington in charge," he grunted, as he put back his glasses and turned

to swear at the chaukra for disobeying orders.

Even at that moment we could not help smiling to see the little chap, lying just behind his master, clutching his captured dagger and looking a regular little spitfire.

"Plenty good fight, Master Sahib!" he said, with his eyes ablaze.

The firing died down and soon stopped altogether; we sent the wounded man limping across to the square tower, took the wretched Maxim up to the top of it, left Lady Jane and his men lying down just beyond the archway, and sent for the lascars to collect the rifles and ammunition from the dead Baluchis and Afghans. Three of them came down quite pluckily, but the fourth wouldn't leave the safety of the tower.

They collected some twelve or fifteen rifles of all kinds, with their different ammunition, and, as Jimmy said grimly: "They may come in handy when we've run short ourselves."

Then we stirred up the fire, which had died down, threw on more wood, and while the rest of the men had a nibble at their biscuits and started cooking rifles again, Jimmy and I went round the other three towers to see if, by any chance, we could hold them. We could not: a monkey could scarcely get up my old tower; not a single man could lie on what was left of that platform, and as for the platforms in the others, nothing remained except a few rotten bits of wood sticking out of the bricks overhead. Inside the tower from which we had been sniped, an Afghan lay with a bullet through his forehead—O'Leary's sniper.

" That settles it!" my pal grunted. " We'll go on cooking rifles." He filled his pipe from the chaukra's haversack and puffed at it thoughtfully.

He and I talked things over.

We realized that Barkhat Khan had probably left his dismounted men to keep an eye on us while he went away with the others to overtake and escort his camels. They would leave us in peace—more or less—until he came back. When he did return, we still expected that he would come back pretty fast with the *Apollos* after him and wouldn't have time to bother about us or the rifles piled up at the bottom of the square tower; he'd be legging it back to the hills as fast as his horses and camels could take him.

We felt fairly well pleased about everything and went on destroying rifles; that was the one thing we thought about—the only thing we could do and the only thing that really mattered.

The fire soon roared again, the gale swept the smoke over the walls, and we went on steadily with this work, but had to interrupt it several times because, every half hour or so, the Afghans down by the huts and on the side of the hill opened fire and gathered as though they intended another rush. Each time they did so we had to go out and back up Lady Jane.

By three o'clock at least two hundred and fifty of those eight hundred rifles had been completely destroyed and every breech-bolt of the eight hundred had been thrown down the well. Unfortunately, that well was not deep—perhaps twenty feet—and had so little water in it that, given time, most of them could be picked up again. However, as you know,

we did not expect that the *Apollos* would give them time, so did not worry about that.

But very soon after three o'clock Simmonds called down from the top of the tower that he could see a caravan of camels coming out of the hills from Bungi. We went up and saw them—twenty-three of them—the same camels which had dumped those rifles in the courtyard. They tramped along heavily laden; they kept wide away from the track and passed round the foot of the hill, a mile off. We saw Afghans go across to them from the huts below us and come back again; we watched those weary camels lurching towards the next range of hills, inland.

We could do nothing to prevent the rifles or ammunition they carried getting away, and we felt angry and bitterly disappointed. Either the *Apollos* had not yet landed or the Skipper had bungled everything—made a hash of it.

Jimmy and I looked at each other, and I knew that he feared as I did.

"At any rate, he'll be in time to stop the big lot of camels—Mir Barkhat's lot—getting down to Bungi," he said cheerfully.

We had to climb down from the parapet, because we made a target which no Afghan could resist; and as they again pretended to attack, we had to take the men out and lie down alongside Lady Jane. Nothing came of it, and we took them back.

The men began asking when we expected the *Apollos*; they did not ask because they felt worried, merely out of curiosity and because they wanted to see a scrap between them and the enemy. We

told them that they would be here before long, and they were quite satisfied—and quite cheerful. For the last couple of hours before sunset the Afghans left us alone; they scattered in the plain, cutting down brushwood, bringing it up to the huts and hurrying down for more. So much did they collect that the heaps of mimosa and camel-thorn scrub showed over the walls. At first we thought this was done to feed the big camel caravan when it returned; soon we realized that they meant to try and smoke us out, or burn us out, during the coming night!

Then Barkhat Khan's camels *did* come; they came half an hour before sunset, came along without being hustled, all of them laden; they swerved away from the foot of our hill, just as the others had done; and before they had begun to disappear to the left in the gloomy half light, a whole mass of horsemen rode slowly out of the same break in the hills from Bungi and stopped to water their horses in the river, in the most leisurely and unconcerned manner possible.

That meant only one thing. The *Apollos* were not even following them. Something must have gone wrong—hopelessly wrong!

Old Jimmy put down his glasses and grunted: "We're in the soup, my bonny lad!—a particularly rich and sticky soup."

I knew it; we both knew that we couldn't hold out against all those chaps for another night. Even if the *kaus* had blown itself out and we had a clear moon, we could not have kept them out if they made up their minds to rush the tower or burn us out.

But the *kaus* showed no sign of stopping. This was

its third night, and it still blew in great moist gusts across the fort; not a break showed in the clouds; it had not yet begun to veer to the south'ard, and the coming night would be as pitch dark as the last had been. If Barkhat Khan meant to get the five hundred rifles which we had not destroyed, he would get them, and he'd get them pretty soon. We knew enough of him and his chaps to know that they'd get us too.

We had to come to some decision quickly. It was already nearly dark, and in half an hour the whole of Barkhat Khan's people would be at the bottom of the hill—and they wouldn't waste time.

Already so much more rifle fire came from the hillside, as though in joyful anticipation of the end, that we had to send another six men to support Lady Jane.

" We'll have to 'op it!" Jimmy burst out.

Note.—We could not understand, at the time, how Barkhat Khan's caravan had come back *laden* so quickly. Afterwards we heard that when the small caravan returned from Bungi, for the second time, every man available—including the villagers of Bungi—had carried a box of ammunition along with it. They had met Barkhat Khan's camels close to the ford in the river, and it was there that they had received their loads.

CHAPTER XII

A Night Escape

Written by Lieutenant Peter Harrison, R.N.

We both felt convinced that to attempt to escape through the archway, to creep along under the wall and try and get down into the plain that way, was simply asking for trouble. We should be certain to run into the Baluchis and Afghans.

We made up our minds to lower ourselves down the back of the square tower, make for the plain, strike inland for an hour or an hour and a half, and then turn to the left and try to find the river. In the dark we might get away undiscovered. We could have buckled our rifle-slings together and lowered ourselves by them; but that well-rope was much more handy, so we determined to use it and to take it along with us.

At the base of that tower—outside the fort—a quarry some fifteen feet deep, with almost vertical sides, made it very difficult, if not impossible, to climb up. From the outside it must have looked just as impossible to climb down, and the chances were that Barkhat Khan would never think that we should try.

But in the angle where one wall joined the tower—

at the foot of it—there was a ledge which gave sufficient foothold, and by skirting along it for about three yards one could get round the edge of the quarry on to the slope of the hill on the side opposite to the archway and the deserted huts.

I ran round and told the men exactly what we meant to do, and sent them to take the well-rope up to the top of the square tower. They seemed rather bewildered; they had never thought things were so alarming. I went out and told Lady Jane; told him to fall back and dash for the top of the tower as soon as he heard Jimmy whistle. He took the unexpected news quite calmly, so calmly that I could not help being surprised at his coolness. "Right-o! I'll bring them along," was all he said.

Then I went up those two flights of steps for the last time and found the well-rope already lowered over the parapet down the outer side of the tower. They had passed it round a beam in the roof, made a loop by knotting the two ends, and there was just light enough for me to see them dangling close to the ledge below.

We waited for a very few minutes; rifle firing burst out again; Jimmy said that it was dark enough and sent me down the rope first. Except that that pain in the side of my chest made me want to yelp, it was easy enough to slide down, because I stuck my toes in the cracks of the brickwork and took my weight on them. My own cutter's crew followed, each man groping his way along the ledge, with the quarry at his feet for a dozen side paces. They had to go on side-stepping and clinging to the wall till they came to

O'Leary, who stood beyond the quarry. My men all came down without making much noise, their rifles slung over their backs, but Dobson and Perrin (he could not hold the rope with his blistered hands) had to be lowered down; they lowered the *Harold's* wounded man, Adolphus, and that one terrified lascar.

I heard a whistle overhead—the signal for Lady Jane to fall back—and the *Harolds* began to come down, Malony, the huge seaman, and Jenkins; after them was lowered the Maxim, its trestle and ammunition box, and they managed to drag them along the ledge. The rest of the *Harolds* followed, their rifles and cutlasses scraping against the walls; they went past me, and disappeared in the darkness; then came Lady Jane's lot—rather out of breath—and last of all the chaukra, Lady Jane, and Jimmy himself. All through this terribly anxious time there was no increase of rifle firing from the other side of the fort, so we felt pretty certain that our escape had not been noticed.

Jimmy and I unreeved the knot in the ends of that rope, hauled at one end, and side-stepped along the ledge till we came to O'Leary. He gave a hand to the rope and the three of us pulled at it. It hitched up for a moment—it must have caught somewhere up above—and then gave way, and we had most of it with us. We passed it along to the men, all clustered together; they had been told what to do, and everyone got a grip on it. We could not see each other, but I felt my way along the rope, counting the men until I came to the end. I made a loop in it there, held on firmly, and started down the hill away from the glow of the bonfire over the top of the wall. It was so dark

that I could not see the ground in front of me, could not see my own feet, and knew perfectly well that without that rope we should be scattered and lost in five minutes. But bights of it kept dragging on the ground, catching in bushes and stones, and we had constantly to stop and clear it. This meant delay and it meant noise. However, the gale would drown the noise, and we passed the word for everyone to edge along the rope until they were almost touching each other. I know that eventually I took two or three turns round my wrist to prevent the rope being dragged out of my hand, and Jimmy, who brought up the rear, told me afterwards that he had gradually worked his way along it until he had five or six fathoms trailing behind him.

We reached the level plain, stopped to get breath and shift the Maxim from one man to another, listened, and heard nothing except a few stray shots coming from behind the fort; we could see, faintly, the glow of the bonfire which gave us our direction. Even then our escape had not been discovered.

We went on faster, stumbling and falling often, but clinging to that rope as the only thing that could keep us together. The men panted and smothered their curses as they struck their feet against stones and stumbled in and out of cracks in the hard half-baked surface of sand and clay. Many of them had burned holes in their boots and blistered their feet on the hot rifle-barrels and already walked with great pain. But we did get along. Pain! they had to bear it, and the knowledge that to be left behind meant a horrible death at daylight kept them going.

We must have dragged ourselves across the plain for nearly half an hour, going as straight inland as I could steer, winding this way and that to get round bushes into which I crashed; then we heard behind us, through the gale, the noise of heavy rifle firing, and guessed that Barkhat Khan's men were " warming up " to rush the fort. The firing did not last long, and we struggled ahead, looking back from time to time to see if they had set fire to the tower to burn us out.

We halted again presently, counted the men to make sure all were there, and old Jimmy felt his way to me. He thought that we could now turn to the left and make for the river bed. It should be about three miles to our left, and if we kept the gale at our backs we must strike it somewhere.

So on we went, our feet getting more and more painful. I had very carefully examined the ground we now had to cross, examined it through my glasses from the top of the tower before the light failed, and from there it looked flat, easy going. Now, in the pitch darkness, it was terribly difficult. Bushes, single bushes, and clumps of them, seemed everywhere. I ran into them at every few yards, and the men behind me pressed me into them before I could draw back. We had to disentangle ourselves, alter course, change back again to what I imagined to be our proper direction, judging by the gale, go on a few yards, stumble into a dry water-course or run up against a ledge. We could see nothing; we had to feel our way, and it made progress very slow indeed. I must have stumbled and fallen down half a dozen times during that next

hour—it was generally the way I discovered that we had come to a ditch or a bank—and each time I fell my side gave me most horrible pain. How Dobson with his wounded shoulder, and the *Harold's* man with the bullet through his thigh, got along, I don't know. The Maxim, its trestle, and the ammunition box were shifted to different men at every halt, and the men carrying them must have had a rotten time. The lascars had already begun to whimper with pain and fright, and Stubbs, who seemed to have lost heart entirely, had almost to be dragged along.

At last we did get to the river bed, staggered down it, came to the stream, and forgot for a time our discomforts in the joy of finding ourselves there. We waded through it, cooling our red-hot feet and scratched legs, scooped up the water to drink and splash on our faces, and got across into comparative safety. At any rate, we now knew where we were.

We threw ourselves down by the edge of the stream, and many of us would have stayed there—so utterly played out we were; but old Jimmy went along the line telling the men that we must get through the gorge in the hills before daylight, that it was not two miles away, and once through it we should be in safety and could go to sleep. He could talk Urdu—the Gulf lingo, which the lascars understood — and so encouraged them that he managed to get them on their feet again. He now separated them, putting one of our own chaps next to each, and once more we started off, groping our way down stream.

At this time we had the gale blowing on our left

shoulders, and if there had been any firing at the fort it should have brought it down to us. But we heard none, nor could we see any flames coming from the direction of the fort, so could only wonder what was happening there.

We had to keep close to the edge of the stream and the going was worse than ever; it was like the most rocky beach you ever knew. We would scramble on a few yards and stop for somebody to pick himself or the Maxim up. We could not help making much noise, and if Barkhat Khan had sent any of his men to cut us off by the river bed they must have heard us. They could have followed us, gradually picking up others to attack us at the mouth of the gorge through which they must know we had to find our way to the sea. It was a most unpleasant feeling, because we were in no condition to cut our way through them in the dark or to fight a rear-guard action if they attempted to rush us.

For another hour and a half—or so it seemed to me—we struggled on with many halts, and the lascars, Adolphus, and the *Harold's* wounded man could hardly keep moving. Jimmy at last decided that we should not attempt to pass through the gorge, and made us turn to the right out of that hateful river bed and try and strike the hills to the right of it. He allowed us to lie down for a few minutes; then we dragged the lascars to their feet, the going became easier, we felt the ground rising steeply, and at last we came up against a rocky face which I could neither scale nor, though I dropped the rope, find my way round.

Jimmy told us that we could lie there until daylight.

As a matter of fact, we could do nothing else—not even being able to find the way down.

Jimmy, Lady Jane, and I got together. Lady Jane had three rifles and bandoliers slung over his shoulder and seemed pretty well dead-beat; Jimmy cursed the *Apollos* for not coming in time and grumbled at leaving all those rifles. The chaukra coiled up close to him and went to sleep; the lascars and Adolphus, just behind us, moaned partly from fright and partly from pain in their feet and legs, but a few angry words from Jimmy stopped that.

"Well, old chap, we're lucky to get everyone here; that rope dodge did the trick," he said cheerily. "We might have been on the top of that bonfire by now."

Although we tried to prevent the men from taking off their boots, several could not stand the pain of them, and had already done so. We feared that they would not get them on again. My wrist-watch had been broken early that day, when our platform had tumbled us all down, but Lady Jane had one with a phosphorescent face and told us that it was nearly half-past ten—more than three and a half hours since we had let ourselves down from the tower. It seemed like weeks.

For the first three hours I kept watch with O'Leary while everyone else slept. Nothing happened, and we heard nothing but the gale. Then Lady Jane and Petty Officer Jones relieved us, and I went to sleep.

When someone shook life into me it was still dark,

but stars showed overhead—in patches—between driving clouds, and the *kaus* had at last begun to blow itself out. Jimmy told me that nothing had happened and that it would be light in half an hour.

We roused the men, and, just as we had feared, those who had taken off their boots could not get them on again—their feet were so swollen.

We made everyone wriggle back against the face of rock, away from the edge, and waited for dawn to show us where we were and if the Afghans and Baluchis had followed us. I think that I shall never forget the coming of that daybreak. It reminded me of nothing so much as watching a photographic film slowly developing—the gradual outlining of the ledge on which we lay—the weather-worn face of the white limestone rock behind us—the haggard, blood- and smoke-stained faces of the line of tired men—the rope which had kept us all together—the wretched Maxim, smothered in mud, and with its water-jacket battered in.

The darkness below us dissolved into a drop of not more than five feet and a gentle slope at one end, the slope up which we had come but had failed to find again in the dark.

As soon as we saw this, Jimmy (telling me to stay where we were until he came back) crawled away down it and disappeared.

Dark swaying shadows, which for a moment looked like a group of men coming towards us, shaped themselves into clumps of camel-thorn and masses of boulders. What looked like a long distant line of hills turned out to be the sharp cut bank in the bluish

clay at the opposite side of the river, with the river bed and the stream itself not five hundred yards away. Presently I could see the plain over which we had dragged ourselves last night and, far away, the little hill with the straight cut outlines of the fort on its top.

Lady Jane and I searched with our glasses every clump of scrub, every fold in the ground, and every place where a human being could conceal himself, and not a sign of one could we see. In broad daylight we searched the caravan track where it passed round Sarzeh, and saw not a trace of horse or camel or man. A few puffs of smoke occasionally showed over the walls of the fort—so the bonfire still smouldered—and but for these and the swaying of the camel-thorn scrub as the last gusts of the *kaus* shook them, not a thing moved. We could not see to our right so did not know how near or how far from the mouth of the gorge we were.

We ourselves looked a terribly bedraggled crowd as we hunted in our haversacks for the last bits of biscuit and shreds of tinned meat.

Very little of my shirt remained except one sleeve and half the back; the others were not much better off. We were covered with scratches, cuts, and bruises, plastered with the stiff bluish mud of the plain. Our feet gave us most trouble.

Then Jimmy suddenly appeared below us, striding along the river bed. He waved to us to come down to him.

We left that well-rope on the ledge (I cut off a piece and still have it), and in ten minutes had limped

down to him and saw the gorge opening out quite close to us.

"Not a soul in sight!" he bellowed, long before we came to him.

We had a drink and then started along the river bed—easy enough in daylight—and until those men, who could not get on their boots, wore through their socks we made good progress. It was an extraordinary relief to have left that horrible rope and to be able to see where to put one's feet.

Once we gained the gorge without being attacked, all was plain sailing; the clouds overhead drifted away, the blue sky showed above us, and we trudged along cheerfully though painfully.

It took us an hour to get through the mile and a half of gorge, and then we came to the meeting-place of the Bungi and Sirik tracks, forded the river, and had only five miles of good surface to Sirik. The men—all of us—forgot our aches and blistered feet. Once Sirik was passed, another three miles along the edge of the khor and the creek would bring us to the shore, and we should see the *Harold* and our two cutters—none of us wanted to see anything else then (except, perhaps, the two wounded men), and we had forgotten all about the *Apollo*.

I and my cutter's crew went on ahead — even Adolphus stepped out bravely—and Jimmy with his men stayed behind to help the lame ducks. As they had to carry the *Harold's* wounded man for the last few miles, our progress was still very slow.

Two miles from the ford and three from Sirik, we saw the *Apollo's* landing-party coming towards us!

O'Leary, trudging along behind me, carrying Perrin's rifle as well as his own, let out a curse when he saw them; and I felt so angry that I did not wave my arm or give a whoop when I recognized Tommy Briggs leading the advance guard. As we came nearer I saw that he was in one of his bad tempers, and he scarcely waited for me to say, "You're twenty-four hours too late!" before he began swearing.

"Twenty-four! It's lucky we're not forty-eight! We've brought along the field-gun. Our Willie wouldn't land without the beastly thing, though Sammy told him he would never be able to drag it through the gorge. With that sea running outside, it kept us back all day yesterday, and we couldn't get it up the creek in the barge until this morning. My word, old chap, you and your lot do look a sight! Whatever has happened?"

But Franklin, the cheeky young Clerk, came running up. "The Skipper wants you."

"He's along with what he calls 'the main column'," Briggs said sarcastically, as I and my men limped along until we found him. I had never disliked the sight of him so much. He was always poking fun at soldiers and pretending to despise them; now he had rigged himself out to look as much like one as he could.

His little beard twitched angrily as I saluted him —Why had I left Sarzeh? Why hadn't I waited for him? Why this and why that? He shook his fist at me, stamped his feet, and finished up with, "You've allowed a couple of thousand rifles to slip through your hands."

He had evidently forgotten, in his temper, that I had not been in command; but I felt so completely flabbergasted that I could only open my mouth and say: "Very good, sir!"

"It's not very good! It's outrageous—a disgrace to the Royal Navy and *my* ship. I'll report you to the Commander-in-Chief; I'll—I'll court-martial you!"

Standing there naked to the waist—for I had thrown away what was left of my shirt—I thought how delightful it would be to feel my fist pounding his face. Then Lady Jane, laden with his men's rifles, came up, and he turned on him and actually wanted to know why he hadn't boarded the Turkish dhow when she first ran ashore.

He saw Petty Officer Jones—one of the best petty officers I have ever known—who had called his tired boat's crew to attention as they passed him, and he swore that he would disrate him. But when my pal Jimmy strode up with black thunder on his face, his huge shoulders slung with bandoliers and rifle-slings, he altered his tune.

"Ah! Ah! Our Honourable come back! You look as though you've had a bad time. I was hurrying up as fast as I could," and the Skipper held out his hand.

Jimmy took not the slightest notice of it, but saluted. "Owing to your delay in relieving me, the whole cargo of that dhow has escaped."

You should have seen the Skipper's mouth open and shut. He didn't know what to say, but then tried to ride the high horse. "You dare to tell me—me, a Captain in the Royal Navy—the Captain of the *Apollo*

—that it was my fault; you—a junior Lieutenant-Commander!" He turned to the clerk. "Did you hear Lieutenant-Commander the Honourable James Crawford, commanding the armed-launch *Harold*, charge me—in front of my officers and men—with losing that cargo of rifles?"

Franklin went very white, clenched his teeth, and said, "No, sir!" Mad with anger—silly with it—the Skipper ordered him to return to the *Apollo* and report himself under arrest, then turned to me and tried to hector me into saying that I had heard Jimmy make a distinct charge against him.

"Certainly not, sir; he made no charge against you."

"You've heard what I said," old Jimmy broke in, trying to control himself and speak respectfully. "I'll write you a report of my proceedings since I received your orders by wireless, and I must request you to forward it to the Commander-in-Chief."

The Skipper stuttered and fumed, kept up his silly tantrums for a minute, and then crumpled up. He actually wanted my pal to tell him if anything more could be done—even now.

Jimmy asked for thirty men and Tommy Briggs; he said that he would go back, pick up the rifle-bolts from the well—if they were still there—and bring them away.

The Skipper snatched at the chance and said he would go himself.

Eventually my extraordinary pal and the Skipper both went, taking with them some seventy of the *Apollos*, but leaving the field-gun and its crew. As

they started off and the rear-guard, with Jenkins in command, passed us, Malony, the *Harold's* big seaman, came over to me.

"I'd like to go along with them, sir; my feet will stick it out, sir." And then he added, with a respectful wink: "I'd never 'ear the last of it if I let Mr. Crawford go where I didn't."

I nodded, and off he went, quite cheerily.

While we had been waiting, Hume, the Staff Surgeon, had time to look at the two wounded men and was not worried about them. He applied iodine and told me to have some more "slapped on" when we got back to the ship.

"You all want it," he smiled, as he looked round at our scratches and bruises. "You want a bath of it —the whole lot of you."

I didn't ask him to look at my side. I guessed that a rib had been broken when we fell off that platform, and I knew that he would stick me on the sick-list if I did so.

We put the Maxim on the field-gun's limber, with its trestle and belt-box; the *Harold's* wounded man sat on it, and off we went for Sirik. The chaukra came with us. Poor little chap! Although he was dead-beat he pleaded very hard, "Master Sahib go! Chaukra go!" But Jimmy wouldn't take him, and I saw to it that he did not go. So he adopted me and limped along at my side, with that big dagger and the butcher's knife stuck through his belt, trying to look very brave but not making much of a hand at it.

When we reached Sirik we found the place deserted —every man, woman, and child in the fort—and

were so pleased to see the *Apollo's* barge, galley, steamboat, and our own two cutters lying out in the khor that I forgot to be angry when the old Wali came up, spreading out his hands, beating his chest and cringing.

I shook some sense into Adolphus, and the cunning old villain tried to excuse himself and his man for running away last night and leaving us on the hillside.

"Very much evil spirit in Sarzeh—much men killed in Sarzeh—Wali of Sirik very brave—fight men—fight much men—Wali no fight evil spirits."

He did his best to propitiate me by telling Adolphus, "All men of Sirik—women—children—stay in fort until Sirdar come back."

Whether they had done so or not, of course I never knew, but, at any rate, none of them had given us away to Barkhat Khan's people, and that was the main point.

I soon had all my party on board the cutters, and the steamboat towed us out through the old creek and alongside the *Harold*. While the *Harold's* men scrambled on board her with the Maxim, I had a yarn with the Gunner, and when he heard that Jimmy had gone back to Sarzeh he seemed rather grumpy. "He's always promising to let me go for one of these jaunts and never lets me."

He told me that from the time we had landed until the gale began to subside, early that morning, he had had to keep his engines moving ahead, to prevent the *Harold* dragging.

I took the wounded men back to the *Apollo* and

found Petty Officer Smedley doing duty as quarter-master. I hadn't seen him since the *Harold* took him across to Muscat.

" How's the wound?" I asked.

" Nothing but a scar, sir," and he pushed his cap back for me to see it.

" I 'ope you'll take me along with you next time, sir. That there Stubbs ain't any too keen on boat work."

" Right you are," I said; " you shall come."

In half an hour Lady Jane and I were washing ourselves down in our little round tin baths outside our cabins, while Sammy Dodington hobbled round us like a hen over her lost chicken and the Paymaster and Staff Engineer made us spin our yarn to them.

CHAPTER XIII

The Derya Begi's Yarn

Written by Lieutenant-Commander the Honourable James Crawford, R.N.

Things have come to a pretty pass if I can't go for a little walk without that great hulking Malony following me. When I toddled back to Sarzeh with the *Apollo's* landing-party, it was not until I wanted to fill my pipe that I remembered that the darned little chaukra had taken my baccy and matches with him. So I dropped back and waited for Hume and Jackson to come up, hoping to borrow some from them—and there was Malony!

"What are you doing here?" I roared at him. "I sent you back to the ship."

"Nothing, sir, nothing!" he replied. "Just comed along for a bit of a walk like; 'appened to bring the haversack what Alexander had; thought as 'ow you'd want a pipeful sometime."

"Your feet all right?" I asked him.

"Pretty middling—parts of 'em, sir," he grinned at me. "They'll stick it out, never you fear, sir."

I made him fill his own pipe from my pouch—the

scoundrel—and then hurried on to overtake the Skipper of the *Apollo*, although I am afraid that he did not enjoy his nice little walk in my company. By the time I had taken him to a delightfully situated residence called Sarzeh fort—very suitable for a country gentleman of retiring disposition and a hobby for an early and unpleasant end—he was as sad and mournful as one could hope to see. As we sauntered along the bed of the river he kept on explaining exactly why he had brought his men ashore only that morning; and at every fresh excuse I would mention casually: " Ah, of course! When the Commander-in-Chief hears *that*, he'll understand why those rifles slipped through our hands."

I showed him round Sarzeh; we viewed the " wing " where old Peter Jackson, the Sub, and all of us had had such a nice little picnic, the roof still littered with our empty cartridge cases, and the last couple of fathoms of that well-rope, which had " parted " when we tried to haul at it—the night before—still hanging from the beam; we inspected the water supply, and we lowered a chap down the well, with rifle-slings, to find out if any rifle-bolts happened to be there. He let himself down into six feet of water and fished up perhaps thirty—all told. As I thought, Barkhat Khan's chaps had been down there first. They had also taken away the " cooked " and bent rifle-barrels, and except for three or four dead horses on the side of the hill there was scarcely a trace of our little show.

No doubt people kept their eyes on us from the hills beyond, but not the sign of a native did we see.

" Well, well!" I said cheerily, " that's a couple of

thousand rifles and a million rounds of ammunition slipped through our hands."

The wretched Skipper squirmed.

So back we went after a jolly picnic lunch—he and I and Malony, with Briggs, Jackson, Hume, the doctor, the cheeky Clerk (who had been forgiven), and seventy-odd *Apollos* with their two Maxims, about as happy and smiling as stuffed owls.

On the way back the Skipper sent for me, and stuttered and stammered: "Look here, Crawford; come over to the *Apollo* and dine with me to-night. We'll write our report to the Commander-in-Chief—write it better with a good dinner inside us."

"Our report?" I replied, innocently. "*Our* report?"

"Ah, yes, my dear fellow! We'd much better send in one combined report."

But I thanked him very politely and told him that I was such a rotten hand at pen-driving that it would take me all my time to write *mine*. "I'll send it over to you as soon as ever I can," I added sweetly.

"Ah, my dear fellow, very good of you; bring it over yourself."

He tried to find out if I really meant to have it forwarded to the Commander-in-Chief, but I kept him dangling on a bit of string all the way to Sirik, and not until we had embarked in the *Apollo's* boats and he had dropped me and Malony on board the *Harold* did I fire my last shot.

"I'll send over my report, sir. I'll add a request for it to be forwarded to the Commander-in-Chief."

He stuttered and twitched his beard, and would have come on board to talk the matter over again but I

saluted him, in my most charming manner, and turned to the Gunner, who was waiting to be beastly unpleasant to me; so he had to shove off.

" Now don't be cross with me, Gunner; you shall go next time—positively next time; I only wanted to stretch my legs a bit."

" Other people want to stretch their legs if it comes to that," he answered. " I'm getting rather tired of this ' next time '. I get all the rotten job of sticking to the *Harold*, and none of the fun."

" Well, well, Gunner, don't be peevish! You do it very nicely," I said soothingly, as Alexander the Great, in his cleanest toggery, tugged at what was left of my shirt and kept on repeating, " Bath, Master Sahib! Hot water—get cold." So I made the Gunner come up to the wheel-deck with me and bully me while I scrubbed myself, and Alexander the Great limped backwards and forwards to the galley for more hot water. I sent him for a couple of bottles of beer.

" No more beer," the young bantam-cock told us gravely, as he brought the two bottles and wedged off the stoppers; so the Gunner and I divided one of them between us, and I sent the other to Malony. If *his* tasted as flat and unpleasant as *ours* tasted, it would serve him right for disobeying orders and following me back to Sarzeh.

" What's the news?" I asked the Gunner, as I completed my toilet. " Has that red-headed signalman picked up anything on his wireless gadgets?"

He told me that Bostock had intercepted some more rude signals from the Flagship to the *Apollo*, asking about those rifles; that she had met the Indian troop-

ships yesterday and intended to land the Expedition early this morning—where, he did not know exactly. He also guessed, from other signals Bostock had picked up, that the lucky old *Sphinx* had made another haul of rifles over on the Arabian coast.

" Well, we've lost a couple of thousand—that about squares things!"

" There'll be a bit of a rumpus about them, I'm thinking," the Gunner said, and I agreed with him.

Alexander the Great, having cleared away my bath and swabbed up the deck, brought us our afternoon tea. I noticed that his feet were much swollen as the result of the night march, and asked him if they were painful.

" Much hot, Master Sahib!"

Poor little wretch! I should think they were.

" You like be a soldier, you young savage?" I asked him.

He pulled himself to attention and said, as though he had already fixed things up in his mind: " Stay with Master Sahib; when Master Sahib go England, chaukra go England; then chaukra go home, be soldier; father soldier — his father soldier — all killed — big fights!"

The little chap, standing there stiffly on his painful feet with his mouth tightened and his eyes blazing, certainly looked as though he had plenty of fighting blood in his veins. " Right-o, Alexander; you shall see England some day—if you good chaukra."

" Chaukra be very good chaukra," he said gravely.

Before I'd swallowed my first cup of tea, who should come over from the *Apollo* but dear old Sammy

Dodington, fussing and bubbling as he always did when he did not know what to say or how to begin to say it. He limped up the ladder, and I sat him down in the Gunner's easy chair. "Out with it, old chap; fill up your pipe and let off steam!"

"Well, Jimmy, it's like this. Our Skipper is in no end of a funk; everything he's done has turned out wrong—he made a mistake at Karyat, and the Admiral gave him a rotten time; then he called in at Jask, on the way here, wasted six or seven hours trying to borrow a hundred Punjabis from the garrison, and wasted at least another twenty-four hours trying to land that wretched field-gun of ours. As a matter of fact, old chap, he think's he's in the soup and that there will be a Court of Inquiry. If there is I shall be hauled into it, and I'll have to tell all that has happened. The worst of it is that I'm supposed to know everything about this gun-running business—I've been out here, off and on, for years and ought to—so they'll worm it all out of me—why I didn't give him better advice, and all that rot. Of course, old chap, I did advise him, and he wouldn't listen to it. Everything will be dragged out, and it will be rotten for the *Apollo*, and very bad for the Skipper."

I let the dear old unselfish, loyal fellow ramble on, but I had definitely made up my mind what I ought to do, so I broke in: "Look here, Sammy; I know what you're going to ask. Your Skipper has sent you across to beg me not to write a report; he thinks that you'll be able to persuade me."

Sammy got redder in the face than ever, and nodded his old head.

" I'm very sorry for the *Apollo*, but I'm not sorry for your Skipper. The sooner he gets home the better it will be for this gun-running business. That's why we are here. My report is going in, and it's going to the Commander-in-Chief. It will only state the orders I received, and how I carried them out; the Admiral can then find out—if he wants to do so—why your Skipper failed to support me in time."

" He'll certainly want to find out," Sammy said, much worried.

The dear old chap stayed with me for an hour, smoking his pipe, and trying to make me alter my mind.

" What d'you think of our Sub now?" he asked, before he went back to the *Apollo*. " There is not much of the tie-and-collar business left about him, is there?"

" He did splendidly," I told him, " could not have done better."

" He's terribly upset about the whole business," Sammy said. " He's worrying at having lost those two men, and the Skipper blames him. He blames everybody but himself. He's even blaming me for not insisting on his taking my advice; says I ought to have given it to him in *writing*, if I thought it so important."

Then he let himself go and blurted out: " I hate the chap!"

Of course he did; I knew that.

As soon as he had left the *Harold* I started writing the wretched report. I put in a good word for the

Apollo's Sub, and for his splendid Petty Officer, Jones; and then I sent for Jenkins and asked him which of the men he thought had done best.

He suggested two of Harrison's stokers—O'Leary and Perrin. Before he went away I asked him if his Maxim wanted much repair, and he told me that he had overhauled it directly he came on board and thought he could put it right. Then I sent for Malony. He might be an insubordinate ruffian, but if anyone would give a straight and honest opinion he would.

"That chap Perrin, sir, every time; seeing 'im a-sitting alongside that bonfire with those chaps firing at him while 'e 'ammered at that Maxim lever, and they dropping down over the walls too; I wouldn't 'ave stayed there a perishing second, that I wouldn't, sir. He did the best, sir, if you arsks me; that's what I thinks."

So I mentioned those two stokers, not really expecting that that would do them much good, and I made it plain enough that I had no alternative but to get out of Sarzeh that night as quickly as I could.

Having finished my report and enclosed a covering letter requesting that it should be forwarded to the Commander-in-Chief, I sent the Gunner across with it to the *Apollo*; and when he returned I signalled for permission to proceed up the coast to my proper station, off Lingah, and steamed away, leaving my slightly wounded man aboard the *Apollo* in Hume's care.

It was not until then that I had time to open an official-looking envelope lying on my bunk, with the Jask Political Officer's stamp on it. The *Apollo*—

as you know—had called in at Jask on her way to Sirik and had evidently brought it.

Major Greenslade, the Political Officer there, was an old friend of mine, a rum chap with a squeaky voice, an eyeglass, and a wooden leg. He'd lost the leg somewhere in a tight corner on the Indian frontier, so now had to content himself with stumping about that rotten place Jask, with its barbed-wire entanglements, wireless masts, telegraph station, and garrison of Punjabis, trying to find out information of any gun-running caravans or of the movements of the Baluchis of the hills inland. I chuckled when I read it.

The Consul at Lingah had found out that a lot of the wild gentry in the Laristan hills behind Lingah were making arrangements for a cargo of rifles to be landed close to that place, in the lee of the Island of Kishm. He had learnt, somehow or other, that the Muscat merchants had sent these rifles to a village sixty miles north of Muscat—a village called Sorab—but that they could not hire a dhow to take them across. Respectable nakhodas were evidently beginning to get a little chary of risking themselves and their dhows at this game! So the Consul at Lingah sent along to tell Greenslade, and this cute chap had chartered a big dhow which happened to be at Jask, and sent her across to get them.

"She'll be flying French colours, old chap," he wrote, "and her nakhoda has orders to wait off the western end of Kishm until he's nabbed. He's a trustworthy old bird called Subdul Bin Nasim, and I've given him written orders to produce in case anyone else collars him, so that he shall not get into

trouble. Not a soul knows anything about it except the Lingah chap, the nakhoda, and myself—so there you are!"

I chuckled until Alexander the Great, hanging my wash-clothes on the rails round the wheel-deck, asked me excitedly: "More fight, Master Sahib?"

"No good fight—plenty rifles, you young fire-eater," I told him, and the Gunner and I read the letter over again.

"The dhow sailed a week ago, you see," I explained. "Jolly old Subdul bin Nasim may be off Kishm Island any morning.

"It's your turn, Gunner," I said solemnly. "Write your last letter home; pay me that half-crown you lost at cribbage—and go where Glory leads."

The ungrateful chap only sniffed. "A nice little turn that will be, standing on her deck all day watching the rifles being hauled up her hatches. Plenty of V.C.'s going a-begging, I don't think; and I don't owe you half a crown, you cheated that last game."

"Well, well, perhaps I did! I can't help sticking the matches in your cribbage-board just where they look nicest, can I?" I said soothingly. He wasn't even pleased when I promised to let him take Alexander the Great with his new dagger—ungrateful fellow!

We kept all this to ourselves. If too many people knew about a little job like this, the secret was likely to leak out sooner or later, and old Mr. Subdul bin Nasim might get his windpipe slit if his pals ashore heard about it.

So off we jogged, Lingah way, most of those of my men who had landed with me limping about like cats

on hot bricks. For months they had had so little exercise on shore that even those who had not burned their feet on the hot rifle-barrels could scarcely hobble for the first few days; and Jenkins, the Corporal of Marines, Master-at-Arms, store-keeper, and doctor rolled into one, had all his work cut out trying to find something in our little medicine-chest which would do them good.

That evening, as we lazily steamed along the coast, Bostock picked up more news from the Flagship. The Expedition had landed down at Galag—a little village a hundred and fifty miles on the other side of Jask, a place where many dhows had run cargoes of rifles during the last season. Nearly a thousand officers and men had disembarked, including a battalion of Gurkhas, a couple of mountain batteries, and a small naval brigade; they intended to advance up country next morning.

"What good will they do?" the Gunner snorted.

"They'll have a nice little walk, I expect, walk till they're tired, and all the Baluchi chiefs will be nice to them and promise not to allow any more rifle caravans to go through. Then they'll walk back again to the coast, and the Baluchis will carry on—as before."

"Another half-dozen old buses like the *Harold*; that's what's wanted," was the Gunner's opinion, and I agreed with him.

Bostock had another bit of news that same night—a very interesting bit of news too. The *Apollo* had been ordered to proceed to Galag, and we wondered what would happen when Our Willie had to give the

Admiral an account of the Sarzeh affair and show him my report.

We pottered about round Kishm Island for several days, hoping to see Mr. Subdul bin Nasim; for though I felt quite certain that he would turn up sooner or later, whether he would have any rifles on board was quite another pair of shoes. The Lingah Consul might have got hold of the wrong end of the yarn, or the Sheikh of Sorab might smell a rat, get suspicious, and not hand over the rifles to Mr. Nasim—in fact anything might happen.

Every evening we received more news of the Expedition, and, as the Gunner and I had imagined, the chaps seemed to be having a very jolly little picnic, though after the experience of the first day's walk they found it more comfortable, and less fatiguing, to march at night. All the Baluchi chieftains near the coast were promising to be good boys for ever and ever; so what more could anybody want!

One day, one absolutely calm day, with not a ripple to dull the glaring surface of the sea, and not a trace of cloud anywhere to drift across the sun and hide it for a few comfortable minutes, the *Persepolis* came in sight, flying at her main the flag of the Governor of the Gulf Coast Ports. I don't suppose that my fat old friend's business had any more urgency than my own; at any rate, he altered course to close the *Harold*, stopped his engines (not much difficulty in doing that; the wonder was how he kept them going), and sent his galley across for me.

I borrowed the Gunner's collar-stud to keep my cricket shirt closed and make me look really smart,

and went back in the galley, quite pleased to have a yarn with the old buffer. He had served for several years in one of our gunboats—the *Pigeon*, I believe—as an interpreter, and though he had now become far and away the most important Persian official in the whole Gulf, was never so happy as when talking of those humble times. Directly he became excited he would drop into the ordinary lingo and quaint turns of expression of a gunboat's lower-deck, as though he had never left it.

He came to the gangway to meet me—waddling along—an enormously fat figure (he must have weighed eighteen stone). " 'Ello! 'ello! Mr. Jimmy; come along and have a cup of corfee, and a bit of a chin-wag."

He took me up to the poop with its three-inch Krupp gun and its little glittering brass muzzle-loading field-gun, under the double awnings, and flopped down in an extra strong, extra large cane chair, while I made myself comfortable in another. The same little chap whom Harrison and I had seen at Sirik gave him a cigarette out of that very same silver-inlaid box which the wretched Wali of Sirik had treasured so highly. I grinned when I saw it, and he winked at me. " Very nice man, the Wali of Sirik; 'ow is the old bloke?"

A couple of servants brought coffee in the most elaborate silver and brass coffee-pot I had ever seen. It must have been nearly three feet high and very valuable; the silver cups, too, were exquisite.

" Another nice Wali?" I asked, pointing to them, and he put a fat ring-covered finger to the tip of his nose, bent over, patted my knee, and said slyly: " I tell you good yarn—very good yarn."

At a grunt from him his " boy " removed his high gold-embroidered black Persian hat and dabbed the perspiration off his nearly bald head; then he unclasped the Derya Begi's patent-leather belt so that the long white tunic could open freely, ran his fingers nimbly down the row of fifty or more gold knobs and gold-threaded loops which kept the inner tunic closed, and my old friend gave a grunt of relief and lay back contentedly while the boy carefully lifted his master's fat legs into a comfortable position on the long chair.

But before he would tell me his yarn I had to tell him about our little picnic to Sarzeh. In some mysterious way he knew of Mir Barkhat Khan's last exploit and that the rifles from the Turkish dhow had been run inland successfully.

When I told him that I had actually had a yarn with that firebrand chieftain himself, he smacked his thick lips and said he would have shot him if he'd been in my place. " Very easy with revolver—go off in your 'and, before you know it. Very sorry, Mr. Barkhat—there's a bullet in your tummy—I'm a bit awkward with a pistol; won't 'appen again—and Mister Barkhat kicks the bucket—no more trouble!"

" You didn't kill him when you had him aboard here last year!" I said.

The Derya Begi's face lost its good humour at this. " No! I wish I had; next time I get the chance I will!" Then a funny thought struck him, and he winked at me. " When he was on board this old bug-trap, I'd bring him up here, sit him in that chair you're sitting in, and 'ave many a nice yarn with him. I thought I might make him useful when I let him go, and would

'ave done, but 'e gave me the slip one night and done a bunk."

He began to grow excited now. "Did a bunk 'e did, and went about telling all them Baluchi friends of 'is how 'e'd diddled me; that's what got my monkey up, what gave me the hump!" and he banged the chair with his fists. "I'll cut his liver out of him—some day!"

He flopped back again, the anger died out of his face, and he winked at me. "There are two darned scoundrels in the Persian Gulf—and Mister Barkhat is one of them."

"Who's the other?" I asked, laughing; and he patted his very prominent corporation and chuckled, "Me!"

"Now I'll tell you a little yarn, Mister Jimmy—'ow that corfee-pot happened to get 'ere. You know Charak—along the coast?" and he jerked his thumb towards the Persian coast beyond Lingah, hidden in the hot haze. "A nice place Charak, and a nice Wali—great friend of mine—like Wali of Sirik! One day not long ago mountain men of Laristan came down and raided it—and raided him; got away with every horse, donkey, sheep, and goat they could drive in front of 'em. The Wali escaped to Lingah with the 'orrid tale, and I 'appened to be there in this old tub and 'appened to 'ave fifty of my own coastguard police with me. So I landed the 'ole crowd—fifty of them and thirty of my own crew—and we took along that little gun," and he pointed to the brass muzzle-loader, a nine-pounder, standing on its field-carriage behind us.

"Those Laristan robbers could not go fast; they had too much to carry and too many goats to drive up to the hills—and I 'eaded them off, got across a pass they must get through before they could escape."

"You!" I said, thoroughly astonished. "Did you go ashore? You don't mean to tell me that you marched inland?"

"Not all the way, Mister Jimmy. I started on a big mule—a very big mule—the strongest mule in Lingah, but 'e couldn't carry me far; his legs gave way under him after a few miles. I tried another mule; they heaved me up on 'is back, but he couldn't hold me—*his* legs gave way too—so I just walked! And I didn't do so bad, Mister Jimmy—not 'arf!—for a man who's a bit on the plump side. Well, any'ow, the Laristan chaps came along—three hundred of them, or more—driving the horses and the sheep and the goats in front of them, and they stops when they saw my men. One of the chiefs came up, very polite, and said as 'ow we were a-standing in their way, and if we'd kindly get out of it they'd go 'ome—and if we wouldn't they'd cut our throats, and go along 'ome afterwards.

"I sat on a large stone, wiping the sweat off my fore'ead, and spoke very softly to that chief. I told 'im 'twasn't numbers what always counted. I showed 'im that little brass gun pointing his way, with the gun's crew a-standing by with their sponges and rammers and what not. He didn't notice 'em a-trembling in the knees—I did! He looked at it, and he looked back at the crowd, all jostled together, a 'undred yards down the path; and he thinks a bit.

"So I 'urried 'im up. 'Feel 'ow 'ot it is,' I says,

and made him feel it—and the sun had made it very 'ot. ' If it stands there much longer,' I says, ' it'll go off of itself;' and he sees the point and did reckon that the gun made a difference—a nice fellow he was —and he said that if we 'alved the loot it would be a pleasant way of settling things—better than letting off that gun in the middle of 'em.

" And we did share it, and he went off home quite 'appy—everybody quite 'appy.

" That's 'ow that corfee-pot got on board," he chuckled.

" You're a bit of an old villain, aren't you?" I laughed, " and I don't think that that gun would have done much harm anyway."

He bent forward, patted my knee, and chuckled. " Mister Jimmy, Mister Jimmy, it might 'ave done if it had any ammunition; but it hasn't had any—not for the last ten years!"

Then he threw himself back in his chair, and his whole body shook with laughter. When at last he let me go, he made me promise to spend a couple of days with him in his palace at Bushire. I had been there before, and we had had a most amusing day's hawking bustard on the plains behind it. The sight we made—he on an extra large mule and I on a donkey—must have been a funny one.

When I did get on board the *Harold*, the Gunner was grumpy, as usual (he hated being left alone), so I sat him down and told him the story of the coffee-pot until he became more cheery. Then we had another game of cribbage. I tried my best not to cheat, and let him win back his half-crown.

CHAPTER XIV

Insurgents Capture Jelali

Written by Lieutenant-Commander the Honourable James Crawford, R.N.

At daybreak on the morning after we had met the *Persepolis* I lay on the sleeping-mat in my bunk, watching Alexander the Great sweeping my dead matches and tobacco-ash off the little deck outside my dog-kennel of a cabin, and getting a charming view of Malony's sunburnt back as he stood at the wheel. Seeing my eyes open, Alexander dashed off to get my morning cup of tea, and then along came that villain Bostock, poking his ginger head through the door.

"What is it this time? Does the Admiral want to know if I've had a good night? Can't you see I'm sound asleep! Read it out, and let me know the worst."

"It ain't no signal, sir, but there's a big dhow a-coming up from the west, sir."

"Flying any colours?" I asked, and he stepped outside and had another squint through his telescope.

"French colours, sir; she's just hoisted them."

"Right-o, Bostock! Give the Gunner my compliments, and ask him to board her."

Malony spun the wheel round and turned the *Harold* to meet her, while Bostock went down the

ladder with my message; and I could almost hear the men growling and grumbling at having to get on their boarding-party gear and man the whaler. This becomes a desperately monotonous business after a time, but for once I hoped that they would get a pleasant surprise.

Alexander brought my tea, and while I sang cheery bits of melody in my bath I had to listen to the Gunner snorting and fuming in his own dog-kennel as he made himself spick and span. When he came out, buckling on his revolver belt and looking surly, I wrapped myself in a towel and took him into my cabin, so that Malony should not overhear us.

" Look here, Gunner, cheer up, there's a good chap! Go through the usual routine; fire a gun to make him stop; do a bit of play-acting when you find his papers are *not* French, and keep up the farce for all you are worth, or somebody or other will smell a rat and the nakhoda will get into trouble."

" I know about that, I do; I've been out here for a couple of years; I'm not likely to give him away."

" Of course you aren't, but do look a little less glum and a bit more bloodthirsty. He may not have any rifles at all—may not have been able to get hold of them."

The dhow—a fine-looking three-master, one of the Karachi traders by the cut of her—came bowling along with a nice little breeze—a very pretty picture. Bang! went the three-pounder in our bows, and the smoke of the blank cartridge had hardly drifted away before she put her helm down and commenced to lower her sails.

I heard the Gunner's surly " Shove off!", saw the

boarding-party pull away from the *Harold*, and they had scarcely left her side before down came the dhow's big French flag.

"What is the ass doing?" I thought.

We stopped our engines, and I watched the Gunner run alongside and go through the usual routine. He held up his hand for papers; an old gentleman handed them down, and then, almost immediately, back came the Gunner. I couldn't think what had happened. He came alongside and up to me, looking disturbed and worried, and burst out with: "I may be a bit of a fool myself, but that nakhoda is simply asking for trouble. Play-acting! That's no blooming good; he hauled down his flag, passed down Persian papers, and gave me this letter for you. He's simply a silly fool; he told the interpreter he'd brought the rifles—nearly a thousand of them; told him so loudly that all his crew could hear—simply gave the show away."

I scratched my head; the sight of the letter itself—a big official European envelope—would alone be enough to make his crew guess that this was a put-up job. He ought to have kept it hidden—hidden from everyone. The chump-headed idiot would certainly find the Persian Gulf much too hot a place for him in future.

I sent the Gunner back, told him to try his best to pretend that it was a proper capture, and that as we had twenty fathoms of water under us he could chuck all the rifles overboard—it would save time. After I had finished my breakfast I took the *Harold* alongside the dhow and climbed across, to be met by the most benign, benevolent old patriarch of an Arab,

with a beautifully combed white beard reaching almost to his waist-belt, spotless white clothes, and the most open, frank, weather-beaten face you'd wish to see. He welcomed me with so much pleasure that I could have hit him.

I barked at him, bellowed at him, and did my best to pretend that I was in a terrible temper. I made our interpreter tell him loudly and keep on telling him loudly—so loudly that all his crew could hear—that I'd have him put in prison and burn his dhow. To try and keep up the pretence I sent him on board the *Harold* and kept him on our little wheel-deck, where everyone could see him, with Malony armed with a revolver to guard him. The dear old grandfather looked so utterly astonished and flabbergasted that I hoped that the crew would be deceived, though I didn't think that very probable.

All that morning the dhow's crew and some of the *Harold's* hauled bundles of rifles out of the dhow's hold and dropped them overboard, while the Gunner sat on the ornamental poop rails and checked them in his notebook. After them came a hundred or so boxes of ammunition, and as they too splashed overboard they made a pleasant enough sound, but all the time I felt that old Subdul bin Nasim had a peckful of troubles in front of him.

Having cleared her holds, we towed the dhow to Lingah and anchored her as far as possible from the usual number of small, badly-found, local dhows moored there. I kept old "grandpa" on board the *Harold* (he was safe there), and I left a couple of my own men in the dhow as a guard.

She now came under the jurisdiction of the British Consul ashore, and for the future safety of the old nakhoda and her crew I meant to go through all the necessary formalities. You can imagine what reason I gave for throwing her cargo overboard—they would lie there, out of harm's way, until the Last Trump sounded—and if that wasn't a sufficiently sound excuse I'd invent any more they liked. Then I put on a tunic and my best helmet, and went ashore to find the Consul. I found him easily enough; the poor beggar lay chattering under a pile of blankets and hot-water bottles, in the middle of a bad go of malaria. He was half-delirious and scarcely knew whether it was Christmas or Easter—and certainly did not care. I stayed with the wretched chap for the best part of an hour, trying to do what I could to make him comfortable; and as he was in no fit state to give advice or to take action, I took the law into my own hands. It was lucky that I did so, for by the time I tramped back to the shore an excited crowd of natives—half-caste Persian-Arabs, the shore-loafing riff-raff of Lingah—had gathered at the edge of the sea, opposite to where Malony lay off in the dinghy, gesticulating and looking extremely hostile. I guessed at once that our trick had leaked out somehow or other.

I pushed my way through them; Malony saw me coming down and pulled the dinghy ashore, and as I stepped into her two or three of those chaps made a half-hearted attempt to jostle me.

Well, I'm a nice gentlemanly, peace-loving, turn-the-other-cheek little fellow, but I couldn't stand that, so got hold of two of them, banged their heads together

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I BARKED AT HIM, BELLOWED AT HIM

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before they could draw their knives, and sent them sprawling among the others. Then Malony pushed off, and they threw stones and offal at us, yelling angrily until we were out of range, while a couple of Persian make-believe policemen looked on from the top of the beach and did nothing.

Malony wanted the two of us to go back and lay out a few with the dinghy's wooden stretchers, but, much as I should have enjoyed a little " free and easy ", I knew that we should not stand a chance against knives and daggers. Also, out of the corner of my eye I had already caught sight of a number of boats round the Karachi dhow and guessed we were wanted over there. Malony pulled across as fast as he could, though before we had gone half the distance the whaler shoved off from the *Harold* with the Gunner, and he reached her first, the shore boats clearing away and lying off at a distance.

The Gunner met me as I climbed on board and saw the dhow's crew huddled together like a flock of frightened sheep close to the main-mast. " What's the matter?" I asked, and it turned out that directly we had anchored her one of the crew had slipped overboard and swum to the next nearest dhow. He evidently knew all about the trick we and the nakhoda had played, and spun the yarn to the chaps on board her. In a very few minutes boats pulled backwards and forwards between those wretched dhows, their crews began to make a " bobbery ", and then they pulled across to our dhow, jeering and howling. They would have tried to rush her had not Jenkins and another marine been on board.

" I saw what was happening," the Gunner told me, " and came over."

Of course one can find excuses for them. So long as cargoes of rifles are captured in the ordinary way, the local chaps put it down, more or less, to " Kismet ", and hope for better luck next time. But for an Arab dhow to help to capture them by trickery wasn't playing the game.

There was only one thing to be done; I went back to the *Harold*, got up her anchor, and took her alongside the dhow, intending to tow her to sea. But to remove a prize from the lawful jurisdiction of a British Consul is a terrible thing to do, involving unpleasant penalties, so I tried to ask the *Intrepid* by wireless for instructions. However, she was two hundred miles away, down at Galag, where the Expedition had landed, and on a hot day Bostock's gadgets would not carry as far as that. At any rate, I could get no reply from the Senior Naval Officer, so I towed the dhow out to sea beyond Kishm.

I wrote out an official cheque for the amount which Greenslade, at Jask, had promised the old patriarch, and I gave him some sound advice—to get out of the Gulf as soon as he could, to paint his dhow out of all recognition, and take on a fresh crew at the first opportunity. To induce him to hurry back to Karachi and change his crew there, I made the cheque payable only at that place. I filled his freshwater barrels from my own tanks, gave him as much ship's biscuit as we could spare, and the dear old Father Christmas smiled benevolently at us all, patted the chaukra on the head (much to the indignation of that young gentleman),

and went back to his dhow. Her happy crew hoisted the three great yards, squeaking and groaning, to the masthead, the sails filled to a gentle northerly breeze, and she bubbled away before it.

Then I took the *Harold* back to Lingah, landed in the whaler, didn't take any notice of the angry scowls of the loafers on the beach, and went along to see how my patient progressed. He had begun to sweat by this time and, except that his head " wanted to burst " at the top, was quite rational. I helped him change into dry pyjamas, and we agreed to say nothing official about his dhow coming into Lingah; so that little matter settled itself amicably. At any rate, twelve hundred rifles, or more, lay peaceably off Kishm in twenty fathoms of water, and Father Christmas was safe for the present—safe while he kept his white beard out of the Gulf.

Jenkins and what he called his " detachment " (the other two marines) were waiting for me on the beach with their bayonets fixed, so the riff-raff crowd did not attempt to interfere with me as I pushed through them to the whaler, pulled across to the *Harold*, and took her to sea.

We sauntered down the coast, poked our nose into a few rotten places, and overhauled a few small dhows with nothing more than the five or six rifles all were allowed to carry for their own protection. Our evening wireless budget from the Flagship kept us informed of that jolly little Expedition, and on the third night out from Lingah, while the Gunner and I played crib-bage, Bostock came along with his usual signal-pad, but with more than his usual grin, and stood over me

while I waded through the messages. The last one—he had evidently put it last for effect—read: " Flag, general signal—Commander Wilkinson of *Merlin* will take over command of *Apollo* from date of joining vice Captain Williams invalided to England."

As I handed this signal to the Gunner I caught Bostock's eye, and I'm certain that he was winking most disrespectfully, and before he went down the ladder I saw him nudge Malony at the wheel, and heard him say: " Our Willie's been 'oofed out of the '*Pollo*—that's proper good news."

" Wonder what's happened?" the Gunner said, with a grin.

" Plain as a pikestaff, my dear Gunner! I expect that the Admiral gave him a pretty good dressing down, and a jolly good hint to find something the matter with himself and be invalided home."

" Don't mind what happened, so long as he gets out of the Gulf," the Gunner sniffed. " I wouldn't have invalided him; I'd have drowned him. What a change for the *Apollo*! She's been all upside down ever since he joined her."

He was right. Wilkinson was a first-rate chap without an ounce of side or nonsense, and the *Apollo* would soon be the same cheery ship she had been in the old days. I felt very pleased, in fact we both were, and in consequence the Gunner and I had quite a cheery evening with our everlasting cribbage.

Just as we were turning in for the night the wireless began crackling again, so I knew Bostock was answering some ship. He came up excitedly in a few minutes.

" Got to 'urry off to Muscat, sir," he said, handing

me another signal. "Flag to *Harold*—proceed to Muscat with all dispatch—repeat."

While I put the *Harold* on her new course, the Gunner dashed down the ladder to shake up the lascar drivers and stokers; smoke began to pour out of our funnel, and very soon the old bus was careering towards Muscat at her best nine-and-a-half knots.

Just before sunset next day we were there; and as I steamed in, wondering why they wanted the *Harold*, a cloud of white smoke belched from one of the lower embrasures of Jelali castle and a splash leapt up in the water under Merani. Almost immediately another burst of smoke and a boom came from the upper ramparts of Merani—almost over our heads—and another splash jumped up at the foot of Jelali. As the smoke drifted away—red in the sunset—I saw half a dozen Arab gunners spunging out the old muzzle-loading gun up there.

The dhows which usually lay huddled under Merani were now anchored off the outer rocks, and the generally crowded landing-place close to the Sultan's palace was entirely deserted. As for the Sultan's armed merchant steamer, she was nowhere to be seen.

"That's a quaint business, Gunner," I said; "they seem to be vexed with each other—those two forts. What can have happened?"

I told him to anchor the *Harold* in my old billet close to the Consulate and my pal Morgan's house. This spot was in line between the two forts; but so much the worse for Jelali or Merani if they fired over me. Directly our anchor had dropped I went ashore, and my pal came down from his house to meet me. It

was almost dark as he took me along to the Consulate and told me what had happened.

"A funny kind of a game, old chap! A couple of hundred of the Indabayan tribe, and a lot of those rascally Beni Khojahs from Mattrah, crept through the defile four nights ago and rushed Jelali. Merani and Jelali have been firing at each other across the harbour ever since. There's been a mighty hubbub; the wretched Sultan doesn't know what to do; he's shut himself up in Merani and wants us to help him out of his trouble. His Beni Bu Ali chaps won't venture out of Merani; messengers go backwards and forwards between the insurgents and the Vizier (he's the only cool-headed chap among them), and the two forts are making a general nuisance of themselves. Their powder is so old that they can't hit each other, and all the shots fall in the harbour—just as those last two did. The British Indian mail steamer was nearly hit two days ago, so we thought we'd better get a move on and telegraphed to the Admiral. A shot from Merani fell in the Consul's compound this morning, and we've made a bobbery about that, but the Sultan's frightened out of his life and can't do anything, poor wretch."

Out on the Political Agent's veranda, the three of us decided to go and see the Sultan early next morning. I went back to dinner with my pal Morgan, and had plenty of yarns to tell him—as you can imagine. When he heard that I had actually spoken to Mir Barkhat Khan, he wanted to know if I had asked him about his delicate son. "He'll have to have that appendix taken out sooner or later," he said, more interested

in that than anything else. I asked him how things were going in Muscat itself, and he told me that Ali Musa (the chief rifle agent in Muscat) had not been so cheery lately with his " Bonjours " and " Comme' va's?".

" You chaps have been picking up too many of his rifles," he said.

While we yarned and smoked and enjoyed ourselves on his veranda, sprawling in the easy chairs, the ordinary night-chanting of the watchers from the castles and the towers inland went on ceaselessly. Presently I tumbled to the fact that it was actually coming from Jelali itself, and couldn't understand why, until Morgan told me that the insurgents who had rushed that castle had not killed the garrison, and that these chaps were still *keeping their usual watch* as though nothing had happened.

" If they keep up howling like that all night long," Morgan said, " they hope to get their wages paid them when all is over and everything has settled down peaceably again!"

I chuckled; it was the funniest thing I had heard for many a long day.

Much as a comfortable room in Morgan's house tempted me, I slept on board the *Harold*, in case anything unpleasant should happen during the night. Next morning I made myself really smart; Alexander clipped my beard, more or less to match the Gunner's, buckled my sword-belt round me, and in my beastly uncomfortable service helmet and a uniform tunic, trousers, and white shoes I went ashore, met the Political Agent, and walked up to the palace. The Vizier—

a rat-faced little chap on springs—had lured the Sultan down from Merani to receive us, and while the Political Agent sat (with his sword between his knees) on a chair on the Sultan's right and I sat (with my sword between mine) on another on his left, the little Vizier never stayed still for a moment—he was the most restless old Arab I've ever seen.

The Political Agent could talk the lingo—of which I knew a few words—but the upshot of it was that the insurgents up in Jelali would go home if the Sultan paid them 50,000 rupees; and every time fifty thousand was mentioned the little wizened sharper of a Vizier would glide across the gaudily decorated room and shake his rat face. He wouldn't give them more than 20,000 rupees (roughly twelve hundred pounds), and I expect that he knew—as Morgan had told me the night before—that the insurgents were running short of food and would have to clear out soon, whatever happened.

"How about a few three-pounder shells as an argument?" I suggested jocularly to the Political Agent; but he shook his head warningly each time I did so. Of course, his whole policy was to maintain the prestige and authority of the Sultan, and my idea would only diminish it.

All the time the pow-wow went on we could hear the dull thuds of the guns from Merani and Jelali still firing at each other—a shot every ten minutes or so—and at each thud the wretched Sultan gave a jump and looked still more wretched.

We came away without matters getting any forrarder, but as we walked along the little water-front

towards the Consulate, and just as we got abreast the *Harold*, a round shot from Jelali fell within a few feet of her and the splash fell on her awnings. That settled matters from our point of view. We decided that we would go, straight away, up to Jelali and offer the insurgents 20,000 rupees—or nothing; and if then they would not clear out to the plains, the *Harold* should try the effect of a few three-pounder shells bursting against the castle. Anyway, they would not do much harm to the walls, and the noise might make those chaps get it into their noddles that we should soon be cross with them.

The Political Agent treated all these people—Sultan, Vizier, chiefs—just as though they were nice, but naughty, children. He turned to me quite placidly and told me to tell the Gunner to keep his eye on us; that we should be in full view of the *Harold* all the way to the main gate of Jelali, and that if he saw me wave my arm he was to burst a few shells against the walls.

The Gunner and the *Harold's* crew were watching us, no doubt wondering what we were going to do about this insult to her awning, so I halloed for the Gunner to come ashore in the dinghy. With him came Alexander the Great, dressed in his best No. 1 rig, and with that Afghan dagger pushed through his broad belt.

"What you do? Go back!" I said angrily, when he jumped ashore, but he only saluted gravely. "Chaukra bring Sahib's baccy, pipe, matches."

He had my haversack with him, and as the Political Agent smiled I let him come.

I gave the Gunner his orders. " When you see me wave my arm, buzz off the blunderbuss; when you see me wave it again, turn off the tap!"

" Very good, sir," he grinned—adding the " sir " because I was in such exalted company!

" Fire at a blank space of wall; be careful not to hurt anybody," the Political Agent told him.

We called for my pal Morgan; waited until he had rigged himself out, and then the three of us—with Alexander the Great " cocking a chest " behind me —walked up the pathway and the rocky steps leading to the main gateway of Jelali. Do not imagine that Jelali resembled the mud fort at Sirik or Sarzeh; except that its walls were not so solid, and that the muzzles of ancient muzzle-loading guns stuck out from the two tiers of embrasures overlooking the harbour, it looked more like some old Welsh castle.

Before we had climbed half-way, a messenger came running after us—an effeminate-looking, sleepy lad—a half-caste nigger-Arab about three sizes bigger than Alexander the Great. He brought a hurried note from the palace that old Mr. Rat-face would now pay 30,000 rupees. He had seen that shot plump into the water near the *Harold*, and expressed his " indignation and regret " at the insult to the British flag.

I was amused at that, but still more amused at the messenger. He was out of breath and trembling with fear at being so close to Jelali and the crowd of turbanned heads looking over the nearest ramparts and towers. No wonder that he was out of breath, because, in addition to carrying a carbine, he wore *two* large revolvers, had *two* bandoliers of cartridges in

metal clips round his shoulders, *two* large curved daggers stuck through his revolver belt, and a bayonet on his hip. But for all that arsenal of deadly weapons he looked the most harmless possible specimen of humanity.

While the Political Agent wrote an answer, the terrified chap would keep on pressing close to us, no doubt to shield himself from any possible bullet which might come his way. Alexander the Great probably thought that he was bent on assassinating me, for I heard a scuffle going on behind me, turned round, and there was my little spit-fire clawing at him wildly, smacking his face as he held up his hands and his carbine to protect himself, and kicking him with his bare feet. Before I could grab the young scoundrel by the neck, the messenger gave a yelp and skedaddled down the path, with my little bantam after him waving his big dagger. I roared to the chaukra to come back, and as he did so, very reluctantly, the Political Agent tried to make the messenger stop; but that walking —or running—arsenal only legged it down to the beach and the palace faster than ever, howling with fright.

"Bad chaukra!" I said, as severely as I could for laughing.

"He go too much by Master Sahib!" was all the satisfaction I got from the young scoundrel as he picked up his turban, which had fallen off in the dog-fight. Even the Political Agent's anxious, worried face broke into a smile, and Morgan couldn't stop laughing. Being a very truthful, well-brought-up young fellow, I wouldn't like to swear that the guttural buzzing noise

that came from the insurgent chaps looking over the ramparts *was* laughter, but it sounded jolly well as if they intended it to be.

When we were fifty yards from the gateway, it swung open and a dozen Arabs came stalking towards us—superb-looking fellows, most of them, and all unarmed except for the usual daggers. The Political Agent went to meet them while Morgan and I (and Alexander the Great) stayed behind. There was not —at any time—the least danger. While they negotiated, Morgan and I stood looking down on the harbour, with the *Harold* lying there, very prominent with her big funnel and cumbrous wireless aerials. Her three-pounder was cocked up towards Jelali, and the gun's crew stood round it; up on the wheel-deck Bostock glued his telescope to his eye, in my direction, and the Gunner, alongside him, fixed his field-glasses on me too. Then a most unpleasant thing—from one point of view—happened. Morgan and I had been talking of the invaliding of the *Apollo's* Skipper, and he had told me that he was leaving by the next slow mail steamer down the Gulf from Jask. Happening to look across the sea in the direction of Jask, I saw a small splodge on the horizon, with a puff of smoke over it, and called Morgan's attention to it.

" Here he comes!" I said, and *waved my arm* in the direction of the approaching steamer.

Bang! went the Harold's gun, and the three-pounder shell burst against the masonry of the huge wall of the castle, burst between two embrasures—at the end farthest from us. The wall was delapidated at the best of times, but that tiny shell, with only a

black powder bursting charge, sent a cataract of bricks and stones rattling down the face of it.

Morgan yelled out; I saw the Political Agent and the insurgent chiefs looking indignant and astonished, and I waved both my arms like a blooming windmill, though not in time to prevent another round being fired and another confounded shell bursting in the same place and sending another cataract of building material trickling down the wall. I saw the Gunner shouting for the gun to cease fire, and ran along to the Political Agent, who called me peremptorily.

" An accident, sir," I said; " it was my rotten fault; the gun won't fire again, I've stopped it."

Those turbaned heads which had been gazing over the battlements had all disappeared like magic, and the Arab chiefs looked at me sternly and reproachfully—quite bewildered. The Political Agent was, naturally, very annoyed and tried to explain things to them.

I felt an absolutely first-class prize ass—a lop-eared worm, if ever there was one. However, as it turned out, the noise of those two shells probably did convince the chiefs that Jelali was a most unhealthy spot for them to stay in; and after long and tedious conversations, and after I had apologized (through the Political Agent) and we had all solemnly shaken hands, everything was satisfactorily arranged. They were to get their 30,000 rupees and were to be permitted to leave Muscat, unmolested by the Sultan's rag-tag and bobtail soldiery.

They first would have to pass along under the outer side of the wall of Muscat, and to make certain that

there should be no attack while they did so, I was to land every available man from the *Harold* and mount guard over the two gateways on the land side, from dawn next day until two hours after the last of them had entered the defile through the rocks which led to the plains beyond.

Long before everything had been settled satisfactorily, Morgan went away to the hospital with one of the insurgent chiefs, an old patient of his, on whose eye he had operated some months ago. Insurrections did not interest him as much as his old operation " case ", and the Political Agent and myself[2]—or, rather, the Political Agent—carried on the tedious business of negotiating, putting things down in writing, to which everyone would agree, getting the signatures of everybody—ourselves included—and then superintending the solemn handing over of thirty bags of rupees in the Consulate compound. Most of the negotiations took place in the Consulate; and from its veranda I watched the British Indian mail steamer from Jask enter harbour and the Gunner board her from the *Harold*, as is customary. With a pair of borrowed field-glasses I caught sight of the *Apollo's* invalided Skipper on the upper deck of the steamer—and that was the last I saw of Our Willie. An hour later the mail steamer left for Karachi, and the Gulf Squadron knew him no more, and a very good job too.

When the agreed-upon terms were ready for signing, and the six chiefs representing the insurgents, and the ferrety Vizier, the Commander-in-Chief of the Sultan's army, the fat Parsee Treasurer, and the Kalantars of Merani and Jelali were assembled in the

Political Agent's study, things hitched up at the last moment. When everybody had signed (or made his mark) and Mr. Ferret-face had rolled up one paper and handed the chiefs the other, they began to murmur angrily. They gathered round the worried Political Agent, sitting at his knee-hole table, and wanted to know why the Sultan himself had not signed. He could, they knew only too well, always disown his Vizier's signature, but not his own—not so easily at any rate; and his they meant to have.

The result was that another hour went by before the patient, very tired Political Agent could induce the Sultan in his palace to sign, and while he was away Morgan and I had to entertain our guests—a quaint company, as you can imagine.

It was dark before we sent them away and told them to behave themselves during the night. The only one who was not happy was the Kalantar or Commandant of Jelali, a fine-looking old man who had been a prisoner there for five days and expected to lose his job.

An hour before dawn I landed with the Gunner and seven men—and, of course, Alexander with my " baccy " haversack. We marched through the almost silent bazaar, past the barren space behind the palace where the Sultan kept his ponies tethered to posts, and found the usual guard at the main gateway just stirring to life. The sleepy young Arab officer had the two ponderous doors unbolted and unbarred, smiled sheepishly, saluted, and trailed back to the palace with his men. I sent the Gunner to take charge of the smaller gateway.

" You've got your picnic, Gunner!" I told him. " Didn't I promise you the very next picnic?" But you can't please some people, and he only muttered: " Rotten sort of picnic this one, I don't think—doing policeman at a gate for a lot of scallywags!"

We did not see the last of those insurgent chaps until long after midday. They may have come in with a rush, they certainly did not hurry out. All that morning they came trailing down from Jelali and past the two gateways where we stood guard; they moved without discipline or order of any kind, except that a few men and one of the leading chiefs did make some pretence of military formation round the donkeys with the 30,000 rupees slung across their backs. Chiefs, as they passed me, raised their hands in salute, but their followers only looked suspiciously at us, or did not trouble even to do that. Many of them had come from villages more than a hundred miles away in the desert, egged on with the hope of capturing Muscat and its rifle warehouses. They shuffled along as though they didn't much relish the long tramp to their homes and didn't expect to handle many of those rupees when they reached them.

The Political Agent came along presently, and when I saw the principal chiefs approaching I drew back to allow him to take their salute. That confounded little chaukra was much too excited to notice me step back, and as they passed and raised their hands gravely, and the gaunt, tall Political Agent kept his hand to his helmet, I saw the young bantam standing alongside him, rigidly to attention, " cocking a chest ",

his hand to his turban and his elbow well tucked up, copying the exaggerated Royal Marines' salute with which Corporal Jenkins favoured me when he tried to be extra polite.

It really turned out to be a wearisome day, and we were bored stiff before the last of that insurgent crowd had disappeared into the mouth of the defile. Then we had to wait for another two hours before I handed over charge of the gateways to the sleepy young Arab officer of the palace guard. So *that* insurrection was successfully put down.[1]

" When we have any more trouble, I'll get you to come along and *wave your arm again*," the Political Agent said, smiling grimly, when he gave me my orders to return to the Persian coast.

[1] To prevent a similar attempt being made to capture Muscat, the Indian Government eventually stationed a half-battalion of Indian troops at Mattrah, on the farther side of the defile.

CHAPTER XV

The Gunner's Experiences

Written by Lieutenant-Commander the Honourable James Crawford, R.N.

Directly the last of those insurgent Arabs had straggled across Jelali's drawbridge, the Sultan's red flags fluttered up every flagstaff on the castle ramparts and were saluted by twelve guns from Merani. I handed over the main gates of Muscat to my young friend in charge of the palace guard, took my men back to the *Harold*—the Gunner as sulky as a rhinoceros—and gave them a "make and mend" afternoon. For the rest of the day Morgan and I chased tennis balls on the Consulate cement court. A beautiful hole where that round-shot from Merani had fallen made the game all the more amusing, and when we had played ourselves to a standstill in the heat Morgan and I lay back in the chairs on his veranda, smoked and yarned, while Jelali—almost overhead—fired a mournful saluting gun every five minutes.

Morgan had a sheaf of news about the Expedition. Everything went smoothly with it; the local chiefs were giving no trouble, and as soon as the little army had reached a rather noted village and fort called

Bint, had had a talk with its potvaliant Mir and showed him a thousand British bayonets, back everyone was to come to the coast, re-embark, and then—and this was the interesting part—go along to Sirik and pay my old friend Barkhat Khan a little visit. That gentleman had asked a lot of his friends to meet this shooting party, among them some two or three thousand Basharkardi Balooks and Ghilzais.

"It ought to finish the gun-running business for this season," Morgan said, "and should be a jolly little show."

Well! I hoped that I should get an invitation. "Rummy way of celebrating a humiliating 'victory'," I suggested, as those mournfully monotonous five-minute guns went on with their banging, filling the still air of the little harbour with black powder smoke; "rather wasteful and expensive?" But Morgan only laughed. "It depends on who's paying for it; as it happens, the unhappy Kalantar and the wretched garrison have to pay for the powder and won't get any wages till the fat Parsee Treasurer has docked it out of them."

"How long will that take?" I asked.

"Six months or so," he told me.

Next morning the *Harold* coaled, filled up with delicacies such as fresh water, bread, vegetables, and a couple of sheep, and sailed for Lingah that afternoon —one of those absolutely calm afternoons when the beastly glaring sea looks like a vast sheet of glass.

Twenty-four hours later we met the "fast" mail steamer *Benares*, on her way up the Gulf to Basra.

I knew her gruff Skipper—" Old Gulf Jock " as he was called—and he signalled that he had an important communication to make, slowed down, and stopped his engines for us to send a boat. When the dinghy pulled across I saw a big canvas bag lowered into it, and while " Old Gulf Jock " waved a cheery " good-bye " from the corner of his bridge and went ahead again, back came the dinghy with a block of ice packed in sawdust—a block of ice fresh from the refrigerator!

Before the *Benares* was out of range I made Bostock climb on top of my cabin with his semaphore and signal " Very many thanks from the *Harolds*—here's to many more merry meetings "; she dipped her flag, we dipped ours, and away she went and was soon lost in the steamy haze.

That ice soon melted down our throats, and on its way down the Gunner's it melted his stony heart. He had not enjoyed his last picnic; he said it didn't count as a " turn ", and was in one of his most surly moods. But after that block of ice—or bits of it—had thawed him, we played our usual game of cribbage after supper, and I gradually coaxed him to talk of the old days, four years ago, when he had been a petty officer in the armed launch *Miner*, whose Skipper, poor old " Mad " Roper, had always treated his Gunner much better than I did him—or so I gathered from what he frequently hinted.

" Now, I did have one picnic in that launch, or out of it," he began, " which was what you would call a picnic—a real picnic—only it wouldn't have stretched your legs. It happened at Sharga—on the

Arabian coast, well inside the Gulf. I was fresh at the job in those days, didn't know much of those chaps, and didn't care—that's what pulled us through. It wasn't the Sheikh's fault, and it wasn't the Skipper's fault—he couldn't help himself, poor chap, going off his head he was—and the Sheikh played the game, I must say. But it was just touch and go, that it was."

I nearly asked him if he'd got out of it *alive*, but thought that might put him off his stroke, so lay back in my chair, cooling my bare feet on the bridge deck rails, while Alexander filled my pipe, supplied me with matches, and hung round hoping to pick up a few details of " much good fight ". By the time the Gunner had got this yarn off his chest he would be as cheery as a young canary, and we would turn in to our little " bye-byes " the best of friends again.

" It was getting latish in the season—somewhere about the middle of May—and the *Miner* was patrolling the bit of coast they call the Pirate coast. The Skipper had been a bit queerish for some time—he'd got the King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions on his brain, and would often stop all work to muster the hands and read 'em bits of it—and I was doing the Gunner's work because he had died of beri-beri. One morning we sighted a dhow which seemed mighty anxious to ' speak ' us; she altered course, ' downed ' sails, and her nakhoda began waving his arms for fear he hadn't been noticed. I pulled across with the interpreter—a plucky youngster—and he told me that the Sheikh of Sharga had sent him along with the news that he had nine hundred rifles and a whole roomful of cartridges stowed safe

in his village, and would we come along lively and fetch 'em. The Sheikh was one of those chaps who'd just signed a treaty to help stop the gun-running from this part of the coast, and had bagged this little lot from some Bedouin who hadn't heard of the treaty and had brought them along—on 'spec'—to hide till they could find a dhow to run them across the Gulf.

"'Mad' Roper got out the Regulations and hunted through them, couldn't find anything to help his fuzzy brain, so wirelessed to the Senior Naval Officer and got orders to buzz off and collar the stuff. Off we went, dropped our anchor as close as we could to Sharga, though not very close because a low spit of sand lay between us and the village. It took me and the whaler's crew an hour to pull round the end of that bit of land."

"Land or sand?" I asked.

"Both," the Gunner snorted, looking at me suspiciously.

"Well, as I was saying, we pulled round the end of that bit of sand—*and* land—found ourselves in a narrow creek, and pulled up it right into the middle of the village. Being fresh at the job and not worrying much, I shoved the whaler between a lot of old dhows tied up alongside the huts on either side—not wider the creek was than the Hard at Portsmouth. There were any numbers of huts and some respectable-sized houses, and a lot of unpleasant-looking Arabs watching us, curious like. Then an old Arab sang out to us to pull in, and we went alongside.

"The interpreter told the old gent what we'd come

for; but he shook his head, said the Sheikh was away at his summer house eight miles down the coast, and he couldn't let us have the rifles unless the Sheikh was there to give them us—and he daren't, either, because the villagers were turning nasty about handing them over and a lot of Bedouin—the Bedouin he'd tricked into leaving them there—were gathering outside the village and sending in rude messages."

"What did you do then?" I asked, trying to work up some excitement.

"Pulled back to the *Miner*," the Gunner said, looking at me severely.

"Off we went down the coast to Ras Al Khaima—eight miles to the east. The Sheikh had his house twelve miles inland, and we anchored at midnight. 'Mad' Roper wanted to dash off, there and then, and find the bloke, but I persuaded him to wait till morning, and in the morning he'd altered his mind and sent me.

"It wasn't a case of taking 'turns' and the 'next time that never comes' in *that* ship," the Gunner interrupted his discourse to rub it into me.

"So off I went, landed with the interpreter at a village, hired a guide and some camels, and away we rode inland to where the Sheikh lived on the side of a hill. I'd never been on the back of one of those animals before, and I've never been on the back of one of them since—and never want to. Stiff! I should think I was stiff, after nearly twelve miles of it, the guide being in a terrible to do all the time, for fear that a lot of Bedouin who were known to be handy might spot us and take us off for ransom—or cut our throats.

When we did find that Sheikh's house I could hardly stand up—my knees were so shaky with trying to grip the saddle every time that lurching beast I was riding bumped me out of it; but we hustled the old gentleman, put him on board another camel, and back the four of us went. He was one of those high-class Arabs; he'd written his name on a bit of paper, and he'd rather die than not stick to what he'd written.

" When I got him alongside the *Harold*, I found the Skipper had had another queer turn and was busy reading the Regulations to the lascars—who didn't understand a word of what he was reading—and wouldn't let us come on board until he'd finished; he wouldn't let anything interrupt him when it took him that way.

" We did get back to Sharga after a time, and I had the job of going up to the village with the Sheikh and six of our chaps to find a dhow, stow all the rifles and cartridge-boxes in her, and bring them out when there was enough depth of water in the creek.

" We were just shoving off with all our rifles and pistols and cutlasses—as usual—when the Skipper looked over the side in a terrible temper, and shouted at us that we ought to turn our rifles and cutlasses into ploughshares and do our duty as men of peace. Anyhow, he ordered us to go without arms—and we went.

" We pulled up into the middle of the village, and though I trusted the Sheikh I didn't half like the look of a lot of the chaps on the banks on either side of us —kind of restless they looked. We hadn't more than a couple of hours' daylight left either—and a lot to do.

" The chaps made way for me and the Sheikh when we landed, and he took me to a strongish house with barred and padlocked doors—just at the edge of the creek it was—and showed me all those rifles and cartridge-boxes. He wanted me to get them away as soon as I could because of trouble brewing inside the village and outside it too. A lot of his own people didn't want to part with them; and a lot of Bedouin were sneaking into the village and were not behindhand in saying what *they* thought of it.

" So I and my six men got hold of an old tub of a dhow, hauled her opposite that house, got some planks across to her so that we could load her, easy like, and were just going to start taking those rifles on board her when we saw a lot of people scurrying about among the huts on the other side and heard a lot of rifle firing. Down came a messenger from the Sheikh to tell us that the trouble had started, so would I kindly do something! Well, what could we do? We hadn't anything but our fists and our boat stretchers, and I was fairly puzzled. Anyhow, there was no taking of them off, not that night; so I sent the messenger back to tell the Sheikh that we wouldn't touch them. He came down himself, presently, with a mob of people—very angry people, most of them—and he locked the padlocks of the big iron bars across the doors of the house—padlocks weighing pounds and pounds, keys to them a foot long.

" The mob saw that we only had our bare hands, and they saw the Sheikh take away the keys, so went off quite content—for the time, anyway.

" The seven of us stopped in that dhow and the

whaler, not twenty yards from the house, scratching our heads because it was getting dark and we had nothing to eat and we didn't want to leave those rifles behind the padlocks. It wasn't a very pleasant place to be in if those Bedouin did try and rush the village —and us—during the night.

" We hadn't been there very long before firing broke out again in the village on both sides of it—remember that we were right in the middle of it, and it was pitch dark—and we sat there feeling pretty jumpy when back came that same messenger, very ' nippily ', bringing a key which fitted the side wall of the house, two baskets full of native food, and the Sheikh's advice that we'd be safer on the roof, as trouble was growing worse. We could hear that clear enough.

" We nipped across with our baskets of food, found the door, fumbled a bit with the key, let ourselves in, and felt our way up some steps to the flat roof. A regular riot was going on all round us—everybody seemed to be firing, and sometimes during the night we heard people scurrying along in front of the house firing off rifles, and thought they'd try and break in. We'd brought along the whaler's lantern, lighted it behind the parapet on the roof, groped about till we found our way down inside the house right to the place where those rifles were stored, and armed ourselves with them. We broke open a couple of cartridge-boxes, hauled them up to the roof, and then felt happier like, lying down all ready, if anything did happen.

" Things began to ease down towards morning

the firing seemed farther away, and we managed to flash a signal across the spit of sand and get an answer from the *Miner* that her Skipper would come in first thing in the morning."

"What about the food?" I asked. "Did you have a good supper?"

The Gunner eyed me reproachfully for interrupting. "A very good supper—melons, native bread, a roasted kid, some stuff like Turkish delight, and 'what not'—a very good supper indeed, and under it all, at the bottom of the baskets, we found those Ali Baba keys of the big padlocked doors.

"Before daybreak the Sheikh's messenger shouted up from the front of the house that his master had driven the Bedouin into the desert and killed several of them; he wanted us to start getting the rifles on board right away.

"By nine o'clock we'd got every rifle and every box of cartridges on board the dhow, and when the tide rose and began to lift her we towed her away from the bank into the middle of the creek. But before there was enough water to get her to sea, the dinghy came in with the Skipper, looking queer. He took away the interpreter and my six men in the whaler, leaving me alone with the dinghy and the man who had pulled her in—a useless kind of chap he was too—in the middle of that Arab village with nine hundred rifles and a quarter of a million rounds of ammunition."

"What made him do that?" I asked.

The Gunner tapped his forehead. "He'd been reading the Regulations, found the *Miner* hadn't done a full power trial, so thought her lascar engine drivers

and stokers would be all the better for a bit of a 'shaking up'! There I and that chap had to wait for three long mortal hours till he came back again and sent the whaler in to tow the dhow out."

"Well, honestly, Gunner, you did have a pretty narrow squeak!"

"You're right! I had. If that Sheikh hadn't played the game, it would have been all 'U P' with us."

Poor old Roper! I'd heard about him many times; he'd had several touches of the sun, and finished up in Yarmouth Hospital not long afterwards. So that yarn having restored the Gunner's good temper, we had our little game of cribbage, melted a few more bits of ice in suitable nourishment, and turned in quite happily.

For some reason or other I couldn't sleep, and the Gunner couldn't sleep, probably for thinking of those happy times before he had to put up with me. I made a good deal of noise hunting for my tin of baccy, and heard him scrambling out of his bunk on the other side of the bulkhead and his bare feet padding round to my door.

"Come to think of it," he started off, "that Sharga story wasn't much of a bloodthirsty yarn. Did I ever tell you when I first got under fire?"

To tell the truth, I could not remember, so I rubbed my eyes, filled my pipe, and told him to carry on. "Blood! That's what I like, Gunner; plenty of gore; rivers of it; I like wading in it, and all you gave me at Sharga was a nice supper of roast kid and Turkish delight. Let us hear about this one."

" 'Twas before the other story, before the Skipper had begun to go dotty, and before the Gunner died of beri-beri. The *Miner* was up near Bushire with the *Philomel*. In those days the chaps up that way went in for gun-running, and the Tangistanis were the cutest and the savagest of the lot. One morning we overhauled a Bahrein pearl-fishing dhow on her way to Bushire to sell her season's catch to the Banyan merchants there, and heard from her that a two-masted dhow, with part of the foremast carried away, had a cargo of rifles on board and was making for a place called Banak. The *Philomel* sent us up there, and sure enough a dhow did come in with only half a foremast, with a deckload of firewood and a crew of bloodthirsty Tangistani cut-throats—as ugly a lot of chaps as ever you want to see. We spent half the day getting her hatches clear and found about sixty rifles.

" What a day that was! The hottest day's work I remember, and it was on that day our Skipper got his first touch of the sun. We took the nakhoda on board the *Miner*, let the rest of the crew pull ashore to their village, and towed the dhow up to Bushire, where she was condemned as a prize and her nakhoda sent to prison for six months.

" About a fortnight afterwards a dhow came in with a wretched Bahrein Arab—one of that same pearl-fishing dhow's crew. He came on board and told us that on their way back from Bushire his dhow had been becalmed off Banak and that some Tangistanis had come off in boats, captured her, cut the throats of four of the crew, lashed the nakhoda him-

self and three others to the anchors and dropped them in deep water. Somehow or other, he had found himself on top of the water and had hidden under the bows while the Tangistanis looted the dhow and set her on fire. When they had gone he swam across to another dhow becalmed close by—the dhow which had brought him to Bushire. The nakhoda of the dhow which had picked him up confirmed the man's yarn, so the *Philomel* and the *Miner* went down, anchored two miles off the village, and the *Philomel* sent in a boat to demand that the murderers should be given up or we'd seize all their dhows lying there. The Wali—or whatever he called himself—laughed at us and told us to come and fetch them. So in we went —I in the *Miner's* whaler, with the *Philomel's* two cutters—and directly we began to get hold of the dhows—lying close inshore they were—the Tangistanis crowded down the beach and opened fire on us. In the first minute we had a couple of chaps wounded in the whaler and the *Philomel* had one killed. We had to shelter behind the dhows, and every time we started to get up their anchors those chaps fired at us. After a while the *Philomel* ordered us back.

"That was pretty hot work while it lasted, but it was nothing to what we went through half an hour later when my whaler pulled in, with a flag of truce, to tell them that we would shell their village if they hindered us. We had a couple of fresh hands in the boat, and the interpreter—the same chap as she has on board still—was standing in the stern-sheets, shouting his message, when they let fly. We backed

off and out of it as fast as we could, but had our bow oar killed and were simply riddled with bullets—Mannlicher bullets. How any of us got away alive, I never can think.

"We didn't waste much time. The *Miner* went close in and argued it with her Maxims and three-pounder, while the *Philomel* buzzed off her 4·7's. She soon had the mud huts tumbling down and the palm-leaf thatching burning. The whole village had scarce a roof to it by the time she left off firing—and I've never been in such a hailstorm of bullets since."

"Did they give up the chaps?" I asked. He shook his head. "No, we killed 'em; we hope we did, and we burnt their dhows. We taught them a lesson, I can tell you."

"Well, that was a bit more bloodthirsty," I told him, and yawned in a gentlemanly way because, actually, I had heard that particular yarn a good many times before.

"D'you know what I should do?" I said, as he went out on the moonlit little wheel-deck and I caught a side view of his face. "I should get Alexander to trim your beard in the morning; its simply an outrage as it is."

"I'm sorry," he said, feeling it anxiously. "It does happen to want trimming badly."

"Right-o, Gunner! Good night. Alexander will trim it *badly*—if anyone can," and I knocked out my pipe and turned over on my sleeping-mat just as the watch sounded eight bells.

Before I could go to sleep Bostock, who always "listened-in" from ten minutes before midnight

until twenty minutes past, began making night hideous with his confounded aerials, and I was wide awake again when he came softly up the deck-ladder. I heard him whisper to the A.B. at the wheel, "Guv'nor awake?" so I called out to him.

"Nothing much, sir. Just thought as 'ow you'd like to hear it if you wasn't asleep," and he held the signal-pad up to the moonlight and read: "'General signal—large three-masted dhow with green stripe round upper works sailed from Muscat at sunset to-day with a cargo of paraffin and seven coffins, name of nakhoda is Mehemet Sharif suspected of carrying rifles, if sighted should be searched.'"

"Right-o, Bostock! She's a hundred and twenty miles astern of us somewhere; if you sight her, search her, but don't wake me again. Good night."

We sighted the Persian coast near Kuhistak next morning and steamed lazily towards Lingah. Two days later we were abreast of Kishm Island, close to where we had picked up old Father Christmas and where those thousand rifles lay snugly down below. Next morning we had the village of Charak abeam—the place from which the Derya Begi's Laristan robbers had looted that splendid coffee-pot which I had seen on board the *Persepolis*. I remembered afterwards how extraordinarily clearly the coast and the rectangular outlines of the village huts and the Wali's fort showed up; but thought nothing of it at the time. I'm blessed if, ten miles past Charak, we didn't sight a grand-looking three-masted dhow, and as we came nearer made out that she had a broad green stripe painted round her. She was one of the finest and

smartest-looking dhows I have ever seen, and looked as trim and well kept as a tea-clipper in the old sailing days. She was evidently making for Lingah or trying to do so; but as there was hardly a puff of air she scarcely showed a ripple under her fore-foot.

It happened to be a Sunday morning, and I had just finished reading prayers on the wheel-deck when we sighted her and steamed closer, not troubling to fire a gun because she lay listlessly swaying from side to side in an oily ground swell, her three huge white sails and yards flopping and creaking as she rolled. There was such an oppressive feeling in the entirely clear air that, being a little suspicious, I asked the Gunner to take a squint at the barometer, but that was steady and gave no information of a storm or anything unpleasant like that. Look anywhere, and not the sign of a fleck of cloud could I see.

I really thought it absurd to imagine that a dhow like this one would " run " rifles, but sent the Gunner across to look through her papers. He hated that job and was in a bad temper when he left, and in a much worse one when he came back, because she tallied exactly with the description which Bostock had brought me in that " general " signal—nakhoda's name, cargo of paraffin in tins, even to the seven coffins—and he knew that he would have the job of searching her.

Not wanting to waste anybody's time, I went across myself, and when I recognized her nakhoda I felt still more puzzled and couldn't make it out. I had often come across Mehemet Sharif; in fact we were quite old pals. Only six months ago I had given him twenty pounds to buy some Persian rugs at Bushire, and he

had brought me things I couldn't have bought myself for twice the money. He was one of the best-known nakhodas in the Gulf and as splendidly honest a chap as old Father Christmas—only a good deal younger and more vigorous.

When I told him, as nicely as I could, that he was suspected of carrying rifles and that I should have to search him, he could not understand it—no more than I could. He showed me all his papers and bills of lading (his cargo of paraffin must have been worth well over a thousand pounds), and it seemed ridiculous to imagine that he would take the risk of running rifles. But I had to do it, and he did everything to help us. Before the Gunner and the search-party had come over, his own chaps had knocked the wedges out of her hatch covers and begun to clear a way to the hold below.

I tried to explain everything in a friendly way, and the grand-looking chap took me down into his own cabin under the poop—where, if anywhere, he would have kept the usual six or seven rifles a dhow is allowed to carry—to show me that he had not even these. He explained, through the interpreter, that his crew of forty-eight men, with their knives, made a good enough protection for him.

I made the interpreter try and tell him that his cabin was a much better one than my own. This made old Sharif smile, and he sent for coffee. I gave him a cigar, and we sat close to the polished brass binnacle on his really snow-white poop while the crew and the search-party hoisted paraffin tins out of the hold, stacking them on deck until they stood

higher than the gunwales. When the search-party went back for dinner I went with them, and after they had gone back again for a couple of hours I heard the rumble of distant thunder, looked towards it, and saw clouds mounting up the sky, very quickly, from the north-west.

I knew enough of Gulf weather to know what was coming—a beastly winter *shamel*, much more unpleasant than the summer one—fiercer, more variable in direction, and generally accompanied with driving squalls of heavy rain.

Malony, watching the clouds scudding up, didn't think much of them and put his trust in the barometer; but he hadn't been out in the Gulf long enough to know its nastiest habits—and I had. The sooner I got the *Harold* and that dhow under shelter the better it would be for both—and the nearest lee lay beyond Charak, behind the big headland of Ras Yarrid, which stuck out fifteen miles down the coast. Already little lazy puffs of air made ruffled patches on the swell between the *Harold* and the dhow, and I noticed the nakhoda and the Gunner looking anxiously at the sky.

I didn't waste time. I sent across our best hawser, made it fast to the dhow's bows, left the Gunner and Jenkins on board her, and commenced to tow her down to Ras Yarrid, while every chap I had began hurriedly unlashing and taking off the *Harold's* awnings. On board the dhow I could see her crew frantically lashing the big sails and making them fast under the shelter of her gunwales. By the time we had made four miles, the advanced edges of those ugly dark

clouds had swept overhead and the horizon to the north-west was blotted out with rain. Thunder rolled continuously. As we passed Charak I saw the little dhows off the village being hauled on shore and the big ones running down towards Ras Yarrid with just a scrap of foresail showing.

The *shamel* caught us up, three miles farther down the coast. It struck the dhow first—a wall of fierce, roaring wind and driving, hissing rain—which swung her high poop until she was almost broadside on, heeled her over, and swept the top rows of paraffin tins on her deck—the tins which showed above her gunwales—into the boiling sea which rushed with it. I saw those bright tins swept overboard like a shoal of silvery fish, and then, with a blast, it struck the *Harold*.

In five minutes she was rolling and yawing like nothing on earth, and I had all my work cut out to manœuvre her so as to prevent the hawser parting at one moment or fouling our screw at the next. It would tauten, lift out of the sea like a bar of iron, spirting water as its strands squeezed together; the *Harold* would shake from stem to stern, and the next moment the dhow would come careering madly towards her, blown down a wave, broadside on, and halve the distance between us.

I had too much to do to worry about the Gunner or Jenkins, and I thought that we should never reach behind Ras Yarrid. When that big headland was half a mile to leeward and another quarter of an hour of this fury would take us into safety, that hawser *did* carry away—parted close to the dhow's bows, and she

began drifting helplessly towards the foot of the rocks and the heavy sea surging over them.

For ten minutes we could do nothing except haul in the hawser to prevent it wrapping itself round our screw. Being a "grass" hawser, it floated on the water, and the howling wind, skimming off the top of the waves, carried the parted end *ahead* of us. I dare not move my engines and rolled gunwale under, time after time. I thought that our big funnel would go overboard, and Bostock's aerial did. We drifted and rolled until both the hawser and the aerial had been brought on board, and by that time the roaring of the surf, not two hundred yards to leeward, added to the howling of the gale and rain and the continuous crashing of the thunder.

The dhow had dropped an anchor directly the hawser had parted, and it had brought her head up to the seas. I saw her, covered with spray, drop a second, but until I could move my engines we were powerless to help her. When, just in time, I managed to get steerage way on the *Harold*, turned her head to sea and began crawling away from those rocks, I saw one of the Charak dhows which had failed to clear the headland being battered to pieces, bottom up, like a whale in a mass of foam, and another, wedged between the rocks, being swept fore and aft by huge seas.

Our dhow seemed to be holding with her two anchors, and I semaphored to the Gunner that I'd try and get a hawser on board again. I steamed ahead of her, made fast a life-buoy to the end of the hawser, and paid it astern; but manœuvre the *Harold* as I could in the rapidly growing darkness I could not

make it drift anywhere near her, and when I tried to tow it *across* her bows and the *Harold* sank in the trough of a wave, she was so close inshore that she touched bottom, bumped, and nearly knocked us off our feet.

For a moment I thought that she was stove in and done for. I yelled to Malony to put her helm over, rang down for half-speed ahead, seized the wheel, sent Malony rushing down below to cheer up the lascar engine drivers and stokers, and was never so thankful in my life as when I felt her engines shaking her as she turned into deeper water and when, as she sank into the next trough, she didn't touch bottom.

By the time the *Harold* had fought her way out of immediate danger it was quite dark, and I could do nothing more to help the dhow, the Gunner, or Jenkins. I could only flash a signal that I would wait behind Ras Yarrid until the weather moderated, and knew that that would give them very little comfort—even if they read it.

The last I saw of the dhow that night, she seemed to have dragged almost on top of the rocks and was nearly hidden in the boiling surf breaking against them.

I steamed out, gave the headland a wide berth, and gradually edged in, in the darkness, until I began to get a little shelter from the gale, and then anchored in ten fathoms. I dare not go closer in as the darkness made my position entirely uncertain. There I stayed until dawn, steaming slowly ahead up to my anchor, and heaving the lead every quarter of an hour, until I

was fairly certain that the anchor held. That night seemed twenty times as long as the night when Peter Harrison, the Sub, and I escaped from Sarzeh, and I never want another like it. The lascars were almost helpless with sea-sickness and fright, and I had to send two of my own chaps into the stokehold to keep the fires going.

Alexander behaved like a young Trojan, hauling in the hawser like a " good 'un ", and once would have been jerked overboard with it had not one of my chaps grabbed him just in time.

The rain and thunder ceased at about midnight, but except for short intervals the gale roared without a break. When daylight came I found that I could have anchored safely half a mile farther inshore; all the Charak dhows which had managed to round Ras Yarrid were in calm water, comparatively, still closer to the beach.

Having battened down everything securely, I weighed and punched back into the gale. A very heavy sea was now running, and I dare not try and push through it at any speed. I expected to see not a trace of the dhow when I got round the end of the towering headland; I thought that she must have dragged on to the rocks and been battered to pieces during the night; so you can imagine our delight when I saw her still holding on with three anchors down. Bostock took in a semaphore from the Gunner that all was well, and as the gale still made it hopeless to attempt to go near her I went back again (and a most unpleasant, tricky business I had, turning her round) behind Ras Yarrid, picked out a comfortable billet,

and stayed there until late the next day. In the afternoon of that day—nearly forty-eight hours after our hawser had parted—the *shamel* ceased almost as suddenly as it had burst, but the sea did not go down until midnight.

Nothing but an unpleasant swell remained when we went back again, the next morning, and found the dhow's crew at the capstan working her up to her anchors. Malony and four men in the whaler got that hawser on board her, and she weighed two of her anchors. The third she couldn't lift, and had to cut away its grass anchor rope. Then we towed her clear. I sent Malony and another seaman to relieve the Gunner and Jenkins and began steaming away for Lingah, where I intended to get a lighter alongside the dhow, clear her holds, and search her thoroughly.

What a yarn the Gunner brought back with him! To say nothing about the danger from the gale, he and Jenkins had spent nearly sixty hours among forty-eight Arabs armed with long knives, but though he tried to hint that they wanted to cut their throats at one part of the proceedings, they actually seemed to have treated them very well indeed, even sharing their food. They would have given them tobacco, but as the hold of the dhow was half full of burst paraffin tins and the oil vapour filled it, they dare not strike a match—to say nothing of lighting a fire to cook food.

So many of the tins had burst open that the Gunner told me they had begun to *bale out* paraffin!

On the way to Lingah we got up our awnings again,

and hung our clothes on the rails to dry in the blazing sunshine.

"Like be sailor?" I asked Alexander, as he made my cabin ship-shape once more.

He shook his head. "Master Sahib sailor; chaukra sailor; when Master Sahib go England, chaukra be soldier."

At Lingah I handed the dhow over to the Consul, who was on his feet again, looking more dead than alive.

He hired a local lighter; we lashed it alongside the dhow, got out every tin of paraffin and—most unpleasant business of all—opened the seven coffins. We went through all the usual routine—ripped up bottom boards, ran a rope under her keel from end to end, in case she had any bundles of rifles suspended there (a dodge often practised), and not a rifle or the trace of a rifle did we find.

I had nothing to do but give the nakhoda a certificate that I had searched his dhow and that he had lost one anchor and seventy odd tins of paraffin, get it counter-signed by the Consul, and make our official apologies.

My old pal Mehemet Sharif took them in a seaman-like manner. I gave him a pound of baccy and a box of good cigars; we shook hands, parted the best of friends, and, I am glad to say, the British Government gave him full compensation—eventually.

"Well, Gunner," I said, as we steamed past Kishm that evening, "you've had your turn at last—a thoroughly good turn too, and one you won't forget in a hurry."

"A good turn! I don't think!" he grumbled. "At any rate, one good turn deserves another—as the saying goes."

"Right-o! Get out the cribbage-board, and I'll give you a hammering."

And so we whiled away one more merry evening!

CHAPTER XVI

Lady Jane in Luck

The Sub—Lady Jane—had at last a stroke of good luck. When he and Peter Harrison returned to the *Apollo* from that unsuccessful Sarzeh expedition, they had already been down in their cutters for more than the usual three weeks, and expected that Tommy Briggs and Jackson would relieve them. They would have done so, but on the way back from Sarzeh with the *Apollo*'s dilatory landing-party Jackson stumbled over a stone in the river bed and wrenched a knee (an old "football" knee) so severely that though he managed to limp back to Sirik, Hume, the Staff Surgeon, promptly put him into his bunk and kept him there, on the sick list.

Peter Harrison might have taken his place had not that broken rib caused him so much pain that, though he managed to conceal his injury from the doctor, he volunteered to stay on board when Sammy Dodington hustled round to find out which of the two wanted to go back to the cutters.

So before the *Apollo* left Sirik, with her very chastened Skipper, to go down the coast and meet the Flagship, Tommy Briggs with a fresh crew manned

the Sirik cutter, and Lady Jane in his own cutter with Petty Officer Jones and a new crew were dropped off Bungi, and the once more happy Sub saw her disappear past Kuh-i-Mubarak with much joy. It was not the same Lady Jane who now started out on this second adventure. He had shaved, and his shorts and cricket shirt were as clean and smart as before; but in the short time he had been on board the *Apollo* he had had his long hair clipped off, and when he climbed down into his boat Sammy Dodington smiled in his fatherly way as he noticed that he had no collar or tie and heard him call out cheerily, " Come along, you chaps; let's shove off, out of it!" instead of snapping orders to the petty officer and the crew as though he were drilling them on the parade ground at Portsmouth Barracks.

" He'll do all right," he chuckled to the Paymaster. " He's learning quickly."

Lady Jane pulled inshore to Bungi creek, and when the *Apollo* was out of sight pulled and sailed round Kuh-i-Mubarak to have a look at the wreck of the big Turkish dhow—that dhow which he had tried to board when he lost two men four days before.

She lay there with a rock through her bottom, half in and half out of water, and some of the men of Bungi were aboard tearing her woodwork out of her and loading it on donkeys; never again would she run rifles—or anything else. They pulled alongside, clambered on board, and found her already picked as clean as a bone—not a fathom of rope or yard of canvas, not a bit of brass or iron work, block or ring bolt, which could be taken away, remained.

Next day he went back to Bungi, pulled up the creek to the village itself, saw the dhow's masts hauled up in front of the Wali's fort, and guessed that in a little while they would be stuck up on top of it, to make more flagstaffs and a braver show when the Wali next welcomed the Derya Begi. The Wali himself—a much finer specimen than the Wali of Sirik, but just as frightened of Barkhat Khan and the Derya Begi—came down to try to explain why he had not been able to drive off those Afghans and how he had been forced to assist them. He brought down baskets of fruit—grapes and figs—and hoped that the amused Sub would always say a good word for him.

A week went past without anything exciting happening; he searched a couple of dhows loaded with firewood and allowed them to pole up the creek to Bungi; he and Petty Officer Jones compared their legs and the healing blisters and cuts and bits of skin they'd knocked off during that night scramble from Sarzeh, and by the time the *Apollo* returned with Sammy Dodington in command (until Captain-Commander Wilkinson could join from the *Merlin*) the Sub felt that he was now quite an old hand at this game.

And what a different ship to pull alongside! Now that Captain Williams had been invalided, and left at Jask to await passage to England, the men looked more cheery already and the Warrant Officers (whom he had bullied so unmercifully) seemed as though a load had been taken off their shoulders. Best of all, the wardroom officers treated him differently; even the cheeky Clerk seemed pleased to see him, and the short-tempered Staff Engineer, who had very seldom

spoken to him, called out, "Hello! young Sub. Enjoying yourself again?" when he climbed on board.

Sammy Dodington, more unassuming and kind-hearted than ever now that he was Commanding Officer, clapped him on the shoulder and had a cheery word for him, and the grim Staff Surgeon smiled when he saw him: "Good news for you, Sub; Jackson is still on the sick list."

Two or three of the men of his first boat's crew, the men who had been with him when Evans and Matthews had been killed and had followed him up to Sarzeh and helped to defend that barricade, came along to pass stores into the boat and had a "Getting along all right, sir!" and a "Hope you'll take me along of you, sir, next time!" for him. That—he suddenly realized—pleased him more, perhaps, than anything else.

When he did push off and the *Apollo* went away to look after Tommy Briggs at Sirik, he felt that she was *his* ship, that he was part and parcel of her and her crew, and that he wouldn't change her for the smartest flagship that ever flew a flag in the Mediterranean or anywhere else.

What a silly ass he had been five weeks ago—almost to the day—standing at the gangway waiting to go down into his cutter, that first time, and thinking that he was impressing people! Well, he knew better now, and felt a humbler chap as he found himself grinning at the cutter's crew, and them grinning back—pals. He saw a grim smile on the petty officer's stern, hard face, and he blurted out: "What a darned fool I was, Jones!"

"You're learning pretty quickly, sir, I'll say that."

"Well, it's you who have taught me," he said, "you and the others," and he felt that life was worth living—a life like this.

When that *shamel*—that unusual winter *shamel* which had so nearly brought disaster to the *Harold*, a hundred miles to the northward—came rushing out of the Gulf, the Sub was lying off Bungi creek; but Petty Officer Jones saw the dark clouds gathering on the horizon, and the cutter had pulled and then sailed—with a corner of the fore-sail hoisted—into safety behind Kuh-i-Mubarak. She stayed there comfortably, close to the wrecked Turkish dhow, and early next morning an excited native came down with a message from the Wali of Bungi that a dhow had been driven ashore during the night between Bungi and Kuh-i-Mubarak, and that she had a lot of rifles on board her. "Would the Sirkar officer come and take them; come quickly, before news goes to Barkhat Khan?"

"That Barkhat Khan can't be anywhere near, that's certain," Petty Officer Jones said, "or the Wali would give him the first chance; you bet he would, sir."

"How long before the gale drops and we can pull back?" the Sub asked him.

"Day after to-morrow, I'm thinking—day after to-morrow, at the earliest," he said, shaking his head at the dark masses of low clouds which scudded over the top of the headland and the raging white seas which surged past it.

"Land? shall we?" the Sub asked excitedly.

"The only thing to do," Jones answered, and stooped down for his revolver and cutlass belt.

So they sent the messenger back—just as a deluge of rain swept over Kuh-i-Mubarak and blotted it out—to tell the Wali that they would come overland and help him. They paid out the anchor rope and pushed the cutter close into the beach, buckled on their cutlasses and revolvers, slung their bandoliers over their shoulders, dragged their rifles from beneath the thwarts, left two men in the boat to haul her out again to her anchor, and waded ashore—the Sub, Jones, six men, and the interpreter (Ahmed—a half-caste Persian). As they hurried across the base of the great headland the rain ceased for a time, and when they were able to look down along the coast towards Bungi they saw, nearly a mile away, close to the beach and almost continuously hidden in spray, the hull and mast of a small dhow and a crowd of natives squatting on the shore abreast her.

As they pushed along against the terrific wind the Wali came to meet them, soaked to the skin, looking utterly miserable, worried, and undecided. He told them that all the crew had got ashore except two, and he held up seven fingers to show how many they were.

Now that the rain had ceased a large number of men could be seen coming towards the wreck from the shelter of some huts beyond it, until there must have been two or three hundred of them gathered there. Almost fifty yards away from them the Wali spoke warningly to the interpreter, pointing to the crowd and shaking his finger.

"Wali say Bungi men good men when no rifles near; not all good men when can get rifles; Wali say no go much near."

"Better halt our chaps, sir; those chaps lose their heads when they smell a bundle of rifles; they'd cut us up in no time, if they could, Wali or no Wali."

When they halted the Wali nodded approval, and then wanted the Sub and Ahmed the interpreter to go down with him to speak to the rescued nakhoda and find out how many rifles he had on board.

"You go along, sir; with our seven rifles handy, they won't be giving any trouble—not yet," Jones said.

As the three went off a heavy sea struck the doomed dhow, tore her last mast out of her, and threw her on her beam-ends; the next lifted her a few yards, swept over her a mass of grey water and spray, and surged up the beach bearing planks, bits of gunwale, and hatch-covers. The men of Bungi dashed to grab these prizes and only made way for the Sub, the Wali, and Ahmed sullenly and defiantly. Most of them had long knives thrust through their belts, and a few had rifles; they all looked as though they only wanted a wink from the Wali to cut the Sub's throat or the throats of the seven miserable Arabs saved from the wreck, who squatted huddled together on the top of the beach, wet through and shivering, with the bodies of the two drowned men alongside them.

The Sub tried to get some information from the nakhoda, but the Arab—a very old man, who had lost his turban and whose wrinkled, clean-shaven scalp looked like crinkled parchment—simply swayed

backwards and forwards on his knees, looking away out to sea, muttering a prayer, and apparently oblivious of anyone or anything except his dhow, pounding to pieces before his eyes.

The Sub could not think what to do; it was not a fortnight since these two or three hundred rascals had worked night and day unloading rifles out of that Turkish dhow, and he probably had wounded or killed some of their pals with his Maxim. Directly this dhow broke up or the sea went down—whichever happened first—they would seize her rifles, and whether Barkhat Khan got them eventually or they kept them for themselves, he would have little chance to capture them.

The Wali seemed just as perplexed and took him back towards the little knot of bluejackets. When clear of the crowd he began a long conversation with Ahmed, pointing to the dhow, the mob, the cutter's crew, and away toward Kuh-i-Mubarak.

When he stopped, Ahmed began: "Wali have much fear; if give rifles to officer men of Bungi much anger, Barkhat Khan come burn Bungi; if Wali kill all crew of dhow no one tell Barkhat Khan—all much peace—officer have some rifles, men of Bungi have some rifles—no harm come Bungi."

The undecided Wali kept looking at the Sub, hoping that this plan of his of killing the crew and sharing the rifles would appease him, and he kept on drawing his finger across his own throat and smiling to show how easily the matter could be settled.

The Sub shouted for Jones and talked it over with him.

Nothing could be done at present—that was evident

—and as it would only be when the Bungi mob actually got hold of any rifles that the Wali might not be able to control them, the cutter's crew must wait there until the sea went down or the rifle bundles were washed ashore. When either happened the Sub and Jones realized that there probably would be trouble; but they both expected that the *Apollo* would be soon coming back to see if their cutter had found shelter from the gale, and she might appear off Bungi at any time.

" She won't hold together much longer," Jones said, as large pieces of the dhow's stern rails and gunwales and one of her hatchways came swirling up the shore and the Bungi men dashed down to secure them.

" There's too many of these chaps about," he went on, " that's the bother, sir. They would play old Harry with us when once we started dragging bundles of rifles up the beach."

Then the Sub made up his mind. He would let the Wali keep twenty or thirty of his men to unload the dhow or drag the bundles of rifles out of the sea, and he would make him send the rest of them back to Bungi. He told Jones that if the crowd didn't go away in ten minutes (he would give the Wali ten minutes) he should fire a volley at them—over their heads at first—to frighten them.

" Ay, ay, sir! The Wali is on our side—down at the bottom of him; he'll do it if you frighten him," Jones agreed, and went back to his six men.

When the Wali understood what was wanted he strode down to his men, who were quarrelling over the bits of wreckage, and began haranguing them,

although he did not seem to be having things his own way; he grabbed at one man and pushed him in the direction of Bungi, but the mob took no notice and never moved. The ten minutes had nearly gone when the Sub shouted to Jones to "stand by", drew his revolver, elbowed his way through the crowd to the Wali, seized him by the neck of his cloak, and began dragging him out of the crowd. He only made a pretence of resistance, kept shouting and pointing to Bungi, and the Sub was almost clear of the crowd when one of them lunged at him with a knife. But as he did so he found himself looking down the muzzle of the Sub's revolver, slunk away, and didn't try again. Jones and his six men fired a volley over their heads, and in the confusion the Sub dragged the not unwilling Wali towards them.

It was touch and go for a few seconds; those who had rifles began unslinging them, but the Wali kept shouting and pointing towards Bungi, and another deluge of rain settled the matter. The mob sullenly commenced streaming back, slowly and defiantly at first, but then broke into a run to gain the shelter of those huts some five hundred yards farther along the beach, leaving the nakhoda alone on the sand. The poor old man—now deserted by his crew—still knelt there, staring at his dhow and the waves that fast battered her to pieces; not one of the Bungi men remained.

"Plucky dodge that of yours, sir," Jones said as the Sub brought along the Wali, who seemed quite unconcerned—except at the driving rain—and patted the Sub approvingly on the shoulder.

The cutter's crew and the Wali on the crest of the beach, the old nakhoda fifty yards farther along, opposite the wreck, with the bodies of his two drowned seamen, and the mob of Bungi men in the shelter of those huts, all waited for the dhow to break up. When that deluge of rain had swept past, some of the Bungi men began sneaking back, and at a hint from the Wali the Sub fired a volley in their direction. Every time any of them advanced from those huts he fired, and they soon gave up that idea and stayed there.

For an hour they waited like this while thunderstorms, of short duration but great severity, swept along the sea and the shore. The dhow still held together, and no bundles of rifles had yet been washed up the beach.

Suddenly, in the interval between two storms, the old nakhoda stiffened himself, held out a scraggy arm pointing seawards, dropped it on his lap, and let his wizened head fall on his chest.

Jones sang out, "There's the *Apollo*, sir!" and there she was, far out at sea, coming to have a look behind Kuh-i-Mubarak to make certain the cutter had found safety. In half an hour she would be behind it, in another half-hour she would learn from the two men left in the cutter what had happened, and an hour later she would have landed forty or fifty men. There was no further need for the Sub or Jones to worry.

"If there *are* rifles on board that dhow, we can reckon they're ours, sir," the Petty Officer said, and the Wali rubbed his hands, secretly pleased that the coming of the *Apollo* settled the matter and that his

doubtful authority over the villagers would not have to be exercised. In an hour one of the two men from the cutter came up panting, to say that " the *'Pollos* would be along in a twinkling ", and an hour later Peter Harrison, the Gunner, and fifty men came marching across Kuh-i-Mubarak in the teeth of another drenching thunderstorm.

Harrison was bursting with news. " We're going up to Sarzeh again; the expedition down the coast has finished there and is coming up to Sirik. The Flagship has gone back to Bombay, and the *Apollo* has to land a naval brigade. Isn't that ripping?"

" I wonder if they'll let me and my chaps go?" the Sub asked excitedly, and gave a whoop of delight when Harrison told him that everyone was to land—both he and Tommy Briggs and their crews.

" Guess who's going to be in command—old Jimmy!"

" D'you hear that, Jones?" the Sub said to his petty officer. " We're all going up to Sarzeh again, with Mr. Crawford."

" He *will* call that a picnic; won't he, sir?" Jones smiled grimly.

" Well, old chap, what's the bother? Tell me all about it," and the Sub, realizing that Peter Harrison had called him " old chap ", felt delighted. He explained what had happened.

The Bungi men had long since disappeared; they had straggled back to Bungi directly the *Apollo* came in sight, and presently the Wali followed them. Harri-

son, the tall, gaunt Gunner, and the Sub stood watching the dhow. She fought for her life like a living creature; she lay on a sandy bottom, and her sides " gave " like springs as the seas dashed her down and rolled her and tried to rend her to pieces. By nightfall she seemed little the worse for her battle, and though she was not thirty yards from the shore the seas were too heavy for the *Apollo's* men to reach her. They had to stay there all night, a night which few of them will ever forget for the discomfort of it. The poor old nakhoda would not stir from the spot where he knelt close to the two drowned Arabs. The loss of his dhow and the loss of the rifles had probably ruined him, and he seemed to have given up heart altogether. He was nothing but a bag of skin and bones, and some of the *Apollos* who had brought their oilskins wrapped them round him.

In the middle of the night the men posted at the edge of the sea reported that large pieces of wreckage were being cast up the beach, but nothing could be done until daybreak, when not a sign of the dhow could be seen and the old nakhoda lay dead among the litter of her wreckage.

Farther down the shore, rolled up reluctantly by the angry sea, the *Apollos* collected fifteen bundles of rifles, and though they waited until past noon no more were washed ashore. Each bundle contained twenty rifle-barrels and locks but no stocks—packed like that so that they might be more easily transported. Rusty they were but serviceable, and if they had reached the Indian frontier the Afridi gunsmiths would soon have fitted stocks to them.

"That's worth the bother—any day," Harrison chuckled, and the taciturn Gunner smiled at the Sub.

"Your first capture, sir; very glad we are to help you."

The Sub did not mind the driving rain; he didn't care if it hailed or snowed icebergs! He looked upon those three hundred rusty rifles as his own—his, and Jones's, and the crew's, and felt boisterously happy.

While they waited the *Apollos* buried the nakhoda and his two men, sticking up the curved stem of the dhow over their grave. It was not, however, likely to stay there, because the Wali had brought a good number of his men to carry the rifles across to Kuh-i-Mubarak, and they were certain not to waste that fine piece of timber—timber was much too scarce and much too valuable to be wasted like that.

During the afternoon, all those rifles having been taken on board the *Apollo*, this cruiser steamed down to Jask, where she expected to pick up her new Commanding Officer, leaving the Sub and his crew snugly at anchor near the wreck of the Turkish dhow.

"I'm sorry for that old nakhoda, sir," Jones said. "This gun-running business do bring trouble—to everyone who dirties his hands with it, that it do."

Ten days after that *shamel* had blown itself out, the men of Sirik and the Wali of Sirik saw a sight they had never seen before and one that they are never likely to see again. Two great white Royal Marine troopships—the *Hardinge* and the *Wellesley*—anchored two miles from the mouth of their creek, and the

Apollo and *Harold* anchored there too. Marching overland from Jask came a hundred Mahratta infantry—the long, lithe, fiery Mahrattas, with fixed bayonets glittering most unpleasantly in the sun, escorting a long caravan of camels and mountain-battery mules. They parked their camels and mules in the sandy space behind the Wali's mud fort, set up their lines in ordered exactness, posted their sentries, and showed such unconcern either for the Wali or his "brave" men that the frightened Wali shut himself up in his fort, hoisted all the Persian flags he possessed to the tops of his rickety flagstaffs, and trembled for his life.

All day long boats had pulled backwards and forwards from the troopships, and those men of Sirik who had ventured down the creek came back with tales of innumerable little broad-shouldered brown men, not much longer than their rifles—fierce little men—panther like, fiercer looking even than the tall grave soldiers behind the fort, and with long curved knives in their belts—men who showed their teeth like savage dogs and obeyed like children the many—very many—tall Sirkar officers who stalked among them. So no wonder that the Wali shut himself up in his fort and prayed to Allah, hoping for the best and expecting the worst.

On board the *Apollo* that evening all was bustle and excitement, because at dawn next morning one hundred and twenty officers and men were to land under the command of the Skipper of the *Harold* and take part in the advance to Sarzeh—and beyond if Barkhat Khan did not wait for them there.

The rifle companies, the Staff Surgeon's lascar stretcher-party, and the Paymaster's food-party had fallen in under the awnings, had been inspected and dismissed, and the battery decks hummed with the laughter and the horse-play of the men who were to go ashore.

Aft, in the Captain's cabin, Staff Officers from the troopships, Major Greenslade, the one-legged Political Officer from Jask, and the Skipper of the *Harold* made the final arrangements with the *Apollo's* temporary Captain for the morrow's landing.

CHAPTER XVII

The Marak Gorge

Written by Lieutenant-Commander the Honourable James Crawford, R.N.

What excitement, what envy, hatred, jealousy, and other deadly sins!—three men to take with me and ten men to choose from—ten because my Sarzeh wounded man had come back from the *Apollo*, warranted sound in wind and limb.

I wanted the Gunner to choose them; but he said that it was none of his business, nothing to do with him. His job was to stay on board; *he* got no picnics.

" ' This time, next time, some time, never ', and it'll go on being ' never ', I reckon," he grumbled, so I had to choose them myself.

The Chief Staff Officer of the B.D., or Baccy and Matches Department, would be Alexander the Great, and my C.S.O.S., or Chief of the Signal Department, would be Ginger Head; but who should run messages and things like that, I didn't know. I only wanted a couple of youngsters, and whoever I chose there was bound to be trouble.

Jenkins had come up to me directly the buzz went round the *Harold* that I was to take charge of the latest school-treat, and he clicked his naked feet

together at me—clicked them till the bones rattled—swung his arm stiffly into the perfect Royal Marines' parade salute, and broke out—as though he'd learnt it off by heart: " Beg pardon, sir; but we hears that a landing-party's to go ashore to-morrow; and me and my detachment of Royal Marine Light Infantry beg your pardon, respectfully, but, as Royal Marines, all three of us considers as 'ow we oughter go—seeing as 'ow we are soldiers first and sailors arterwards."

By the time I'd implored him, with tears in my eyes, not to dislocate his shoulder or jerk his arm off, Malony had followed him up the ladder and interrupted our little chat, scowling fiercely at Jenkins. He begged my pardon too, although he looked as though he wanted to wring my neck if I didn't agree with him, and, doing his best to speak coolly and get it over in one breath, said: " The Royal Navy men on the mess deck, sir, thinks as 'ow the R.N. coming afore the R.M.L.I. that they oughter go first, and they desires me, I being—as one may say—the senior seaman on board, to put it very respectfully in a proper quarter-deck manner afore you, sir."

They stood glaring at one another—and at me—waiting for Solomon to give his decision.

" Look here, you two; I must take Bostock and I only want a couple of youngsters to run errands and take messages, little things like that. You go away and fix it up between you."

An hour later, while Alexander was getting my things ready for the morning, Malony came up to polish the brasswork round the wheel-deck, and I asked him if they'd settled matters.

"'Them's stubborn chaps, them Marines; they ain't got no pride in 'em," was all that I could get out of him at first, but when presently he gave a vicious rub at where I'd knocked my pipe out against his brass rails he jerked out: "Fancy a full lance-corporal going ashore to run messages—and 'im always gassing about 'is 'detachment'—*de-tach-ment*, I arsks you!"

"So Jenkins is coming, is he?" I said, "and who's the other?"

"Who d'you think?" he grunted, making a dab at another pipe mark. "D'you think I'm a-going to let you go ashore, on your lonesome, with nothing but a marine lance-corporal to look arter you? I ain't ever let you go without coming to keep an eye on you, and I ain't a-going to let you go this time!"

"A couple of youngsters; that's all I want," I protested.

"We've settled it—down below," and he jerked his thumb down the ladder and went on with his polishing. So I had to leave it like that.

"Everything ready, Alexander?" I asked the excited chaukra, who had been watching all day long the boat-loads of Gurkhas as they passed the *Harold* on their way ashore. "Baccy, pipe, matches?"

"Sahib have sword?" he asked, holding up that implement.

I shook my head, much to his disappointment. The wretched thing would only be in the way, and my thick stick would make a much more useful finish to my get-up.

I spent the rest of the day on board the *Apollo* fixing up details with the soldiers—the Colonel, who

was to boss the show, and old Greenslade, my " eye-glass ", one-legged pal from Jask, who meant to come along with us in spite of his wooden leg if only he could borrow an army mule. Of course, Wilkinson —the *Apollo's* new Commanding Officer—should have taken on this naval-brigade business instead of me; but he was one of those desperately unselfish sort of chaps.

" My dear chap," he said, " I've only come to this ship for a dog-watch; it's Sammy Dodington's job, really, but his game leg makes that impossible—and you're the next on tap."

I could only thank him most gratefully and go off and have a yarn with old Sammy. If Greenslade could go with only one leg, there was no earthly reason why he shouldn't—with one and three-quarters. His cheery old face got redder than ever, and he flustered and stuttered: " I'm only a crock with my leg; my job's on board here. I couldn't keep up with the men—I know that."

Well, if every First Lieutenant did his job as Sammy did his, First Lieutenants ought to get first-class passes to heaven some day.

Early next morning, just as the sun rose behind the hills, Alexander the Great, Malony, Jenkins, Bostock, and myself landed in front of the Wali's mud fort with a hundred and twenty *Apollos*—Peter, in command of them, Briggs, the Sub, Hume with his lascar stretcher-bearers, and a Ship's Steward with another lot of lascars carrying extra rations.

The Wali and every man, woman, and child huddled in front of the fort and the top of the beach stood

watching the—to them—wonderful sight. The tall Sikhs with their carbines and long sabres strapped the bits of their mountain-guns on the backs of the mules, and company after company of Gurkhas strutted past towards the palm groves behind the village.

When one comes to think of it, the sight of all those grand little chaps—the most perfect little born fighters in the world, perfectly disciplined by those few tall thin officers, and looking the complete picture of happiness—must have been a wonderful sight to those wretched, impoverished, mean-spirited riff-raff of Sirik.

A couple of companies of Gurkhas formed the advance guard; then came my little lot and one mountain-battery, the rest of the eight hundred Gurkhas and the second battery, the army doctors with their chaps astern, and behind us a couple of hundred transport camels and mules, with details of the Gurkhas acting as escort and rear-guard—the only fellows who did not seem happy. More than a thousand bipeds and two hundred odd quadrupeds—and didn't we raise the dust as we shuffled along the sandy track from Sirik to the ford across the Gaz River.

Soon after we had pushed off, my "eye-glass" pal from Jask rode his mule alongside me, with his wooden leg hanging from the saddle.

"I'll borrow that if we get in a scrap," I suggested.

"Borrow it; why?" he asked.

"My dear old chap, it will make the finest club I ever saw," I told him, and had a queer feeling that if the Gunner had been there in one of his superstitious moods he would have reproved me for making

jokes about wooden legs—at this time, at any rate.

Colonel Haverford, who commanded the whole picnic, joined us—a chap about five feet six and as broad as I am, with a neck like a bull's, tanned a vivid scarlet. He carried a stick which looked more like a barge pole and as a stick was positively disgraceful. My old knobbed stick looked refined and elegant beside it, and I blessed him and it because every time I had passed one of his officers with his long sword in its brown-leather scabbard hanging from his Sam Browne belt, Alexander the Great had looked reproachfully at me.

"Master Sahib no look burra Sahib," I had heard him tell Malony; but when the great "IT" came along with his barge pole the young snob brightened up and treated me with more respect. The Colonel had also brought along his own chaukra—a few sizes bigger than mine—to carry *his* war outfit of baccy and matches, and the two bloodthirsty young rascals quickly became great pals.

Old Bull Neck and Eye Glass told me that Barkhat Khan was supposed to have a couple of thousand chaps with him at Sarzeh, and was expecting another couple of thousand to join him almost immediately. They did not think that he meant to wait for us at Sarzeh, but thought it more likely that he would move back behind the next range of hills. Anyhow, we agreed that it was a jolly pleasant little show, and hoped that old man Barkhat would put up a bit of a fight. We knew that it would be a great disappointment to him if he couldn't.

I told Eye Glass about that old Father Christmas

of a nakhoda. " He'll get his throat cut, if he stays in the Gulf," I said, and was very glad to hear that the old chap had called in at Jask and sailed away again to cash his cheque at Karachi.

" Why did he put in at Jask?" I asked.

Eye Glass smiled. " Only wanted to show me your cheque and let me know that he'd done what he'd promised to do."

At the other side of the ford fifty or sixty armed bandits belonging to the Wali of Kuhistak—Mir Kambar—joined our party. I had never met the gentleman before, but among that villainous-looking lot of scoundrels he easily took first prize with his bushy eyebrows, his one eye (and that one crafty enough for two), bristling moustache and henna-stained beard, arrayed marvellously, and carrying a varied assortment of cutlery, bandoliers, and a silver ornamented rifle. With him came Barkhat Khan's father-in-law—Mir Haji, the nominal Governor of the whole province—a fairly honest-looking cove on a sturdy horse and wearing a very uncomfortably large pair of riding-boots. If we had had my old friend the Derya Begi with us the party would have been quite complete; but that old gentleman, though invited and very anxious to come to the picnic, had taken the *Persepolis* into Lingah or Bunder Abbas to mend her engines and could not get down the coast in time.

Mir Kambar and Mir Haji did not know if the gorge in front of us was still occupied by the enemy; so another company of Gurkhas went off to join the advance guard, and as old Bull Neck suggested that

we naval chaps might like to stretch our legs, I took my little lot away in support. It didn't amount to much, because the little Gurkhas in front—a quarter of a mile in front—only managed to turn out half a dozen or so Balooks whom Barkhat had left behind to keep an eye on us.

We got through the gorge comfortably enough except for the heat, filled our water-bottles before we turned away from the stream, and as we altered course towards Sarzeh fort, in the plain beyond, Peter Harrison and I caught sight of that ledge on which we all had slept that night we escaped from Sarzeh.

The Gurkhas and our mounted bandits soon found that the fort had been abandoned, and the whole force bivouacked for the night round the base of the little hill.

When we naval chaps take a hand with the Army in little shows such as this, the Army makes a point of treating us like pampered guests. They won't let us do any of the ordinary camp routine, but give us the pick of the plums when it comes to the scrapping. So, having chosen a nice little open bit of ground with enough camel-thorn scrub to make fires, we settled down quite serenely for the night, while the transport column came trailing into camp and the Gurkhas sent out their pickets.

After we had had our suppers, most of the Army officers dropped in to pass the time of day and find out if they could do anything more to make us happy. With them came the Army doctors, and while they were there that very fine-looking stoker O'Leary happened to come up to report something or other to

Peter Harrison. I called out, " Hello, O'Leary! glad you've come along with us," and as he saluted—more like a soldier than a bluejacket—I noticed that one of the Army doctors looked at him and seemed puzzled. When he went back, this chap sang out: " I've seen that man somewhere; I know his face and I know those tattoo marks. I'm certain I've seen him before; who is he?"

Peter told him his name and that he was one of our stokers.

" He may be a stoker," I said, " but he's a born soldier and one of the pick of 'em."

" Well, I've seen him before—somewhere!" the doctor muttered.

We took all these chaps over *our* fort—a personally conducted Cook's tour—and showed them all the objects of interest—the platform (or what remained of it) which had tipped my old pal Peter into the heap of bricks below, the well into which we had dropped the rifle-bolts and out of which Barkhat had fished them, the square tower from the top of which we had let ourselves down by that well-rope, and many other interesting historical details. The Gurkhas had already fixed their helio signal-tripod on top of it and were " winking " to their pickets three miles away, so we did not climb up and disturb them.

As we went down the hill again I said to the Sub: " I hear you bagged a couple of hundred rifles the other day; that *shamel* brought you better luck than it brought us. The *Harold* spent those three days searching a dhow with nothing in her but paraffin tins and coffins."

I was getting to like the chap. He had lost all those nonsensical airs which had so irritated me at first. He explained that if Peter Harrison had not brought a party ashore from the *Apollo* in the nick of time he would never have captured them.

Old Peter was wanted when we returned to camp. His Petty Officer, the one I had taken across to Muscat with that wound on his forehead, had brought up two men, a silly young seaman and a miserable little stoker.

" That there Reuben Wiggs," I heard the Petty Officer begin, " 'as gone and lost 'is sword bagonet;" and the silly fool bleated, " I 'ad it in me 'and—not 'arf an 'our gone," and held out an empty horny fist to back up his evidence!

Peter sent him away to have another search for it, and then the Petty Officer rapped out, " Stoker Jeremiah Tims!" and the little man whined that, " e'd 'ad to carry one end of a cartridge-box nearly all day, and 'e could tell of men who 'adn't 'ad to carry one, not since they comed ashore—and everybody was agin 'im ".

I left Peter to settle that matter, went in search of my baccy, and found Jenkins had my haversack. " Alexander heaved it at me and went off," he explained angrily, so I sent him to find the young rascal, and presently he dragged him back by the neck.

" Found him among the mountain-battery gunners; stuffing him with yarns, I guess they were; 'ere he is, sir."

" Bad chaukra! Why chaukra leave master?" I bellowed at him.

"Want hear plenty fight, Master Sahib; learn be soldier some day; when Master Sahib go England, chaukra be soldier."

I made him stand at attention behind me; but a few minutes afterwards I heard half a dozen rifle shots—very faint in the distance, where the pickets had been posted—so went off to find old Bull Neck in case he wanted us.

I found Eye Glass screwing on his wooden leg. "We were just coming across to see you," he said. "We're in touch with a few mounted chaps over at the next line of hills. They're holding the mouth of the Marak gorge, and we want to move up there by sunrise to-morrow. Your people will lead the attack —if there is one."

"Right-o, old chap! I'll put my little lot to bed early; we'll be there. Many thanks," and having fixed up things with Bull Neck we soon were coiled down on our beds of blue clay and camel-thorn with orders to be "shaken" at three o'clock.

At four o'clock next morning we moved off as fresh as paint with a drop of cocoa and some biscuit and tinned beef inside us—a rollicking crowd as happy as sandboys. We marched some four miles or so to a village called Gwaj, from which we were supposed to start this attack on the mouth of Marak gorge as the sun rose. The Gurkhas who had occupied it half an hour previously had turned out a few mounted men and found that they had left a letter of sorts with the local boss—a letter from Barkhat Khan himself. Instead of having a nice little fight before the sun

made it too hot to be really enjoyable, we held a council of war under a big tree in the centre of the village—Bull Neck, Eye Glass, the officer commanding the two mountain-batteries, Mir Kambar, Mir Haji, and myself. In this letter Barkhat regretted that he had not been able to meet us at Sarzeh, but promised us a pretty efficacious trouncing if we'd only come along to a still farther gorge—the gorge of Pashak beyond Marak. The letter was chock-full of bounce, but could only mean that his reinforcements of two thousand Basharkardis and Ghilzais had missed the first train and didn't know if there would be a second —or to put it more plainly, he wasn't now quite so sure that they were coming at all.

From all we could gather from the local nobility, this Marak gorge had a pretty bad reputation—a good deal longer than the one near Sarzeh, narrower, with steep cut sides and so many unpleasant bends and twists that a couple of hundred chaps, well posted, could hold it against thousands.

So our special morning picnic fell through for the moment, and all that day was wasted—or seemed wasted to many of us—while more reconnaissances were made and our one-eyed Mir and Barkhat's father-in-law took their outlaws away to pick up more news. An advanced picket of Gurkhas climbed up a hill overlooking the mouth of Marak gorge and reported, late that afternoon, that they could see parties of the enemy trekking up the gorge—evidently retiring. So old Bull Neck determined to force it next day.

Before daybreak we broke camp, met with no opposition, and pushed into the gorge along a half-

dried-up stream, scuffling through loose deep sand, with most unpleasantly steep walls of that blue limestone kind of stuff rising in broken terraces on either side of us, and intersected by numerous almost perpendicular ravines—a perfectly ideal place to defend. In fact it was such a confoundedly unpleasant place to be in that all the transport remained behind at the village.

We wound along it for several hours, spitting the sand-dust out of our mouths, and as the sun began to pour down into the gorge the place became as hot as an oven—not a breath of air between the wall-like cliffs on both sides, the hot sand blistering a good many of my chaps' feet, and above us the strip of blue sky with not a speck to relieve the hot monotony of it, except a solitary vulture which kept just ahead of the advance guard and every now and again flapped lazily across from side to side.

"I don't like that blooming crow, it ain't cheerful-like," I heard Malony tell Jenkins and Bostock as the three of them plodded along behind me.

"Crow! That ain't no crow; that's a Bromley-kite," Jenkins snorted. "Shows what a fat lot you knows about these 'ere birds."

We halted at midday for half an hour when we were some two miles and a half from the mouth of the gorge and then pushed on again, very slowly, because the advanced companies of Gurkhas, well ahead of us, had to do their best to climb the walls and ledges and scale the ravines on either side to make certain that we did not run our heads into an ambush. The *Apollos* supported these two companies, marching

on either side of the stream. Peter Harrison's and the Sub's lot on the right and Briggs with his chaps on the left of it; immediately behind us came the mountain-battery mules. About three o'clock in the afternoon we approached a particularly sharp left-hand bend in the stream where the gorge opened out somewhat; and the little brown chaps, scaling the sides wherever they could claw themselves up, were about three hundred yards from it when a rifle went off beyond them, then another and another. Their signalmen began wagging their blue flags and some of them—on the right—began firing too. I'd just sent Malony and Jenkins to tell Harrison and the Sub to extend to the right and Briggs farther to the left, when the mountain-battery mules hurried through the gap between them and a message came from old Bull Neck ordering us to advance, and informing me that another couple of companies were coming up in support.

The gunners had spotted some of the enemy—or thought they had—and within five minutes of that first rifle shot began spitting out their little shells, each of which, as it burst against the sides of the bend some four hundred yards away, knocked off bits of limestone and showed conspicuous blue patches of clay underneath.

Off we went, trying our best to extend on both flanks, and I went away towards the right with Harrison and the Sub because most of the firing seemed to come from that direction.

The men helped each other up the ledges and dashed along to the next. Malony and Jenkins would give

me a shove up, I'd give them a hand, they would sling Alexander up, and off we would go again; but it was impossible to keep any pretence of a line, and what with the noise of the rifles, the mountain-guns, the two Maxim-guns belonging to the Gurkhas, and the excitement, one could shout oneself hoarse without doing any good.

I sent Malony to tell the Sub not to get too far ahead, and by the time he'd given his message and come back there was quite a pretty little fight going on. We'd joined up with a good many of the Gurkhas by this time, and bullets came over in good numbers—overhead, most of them; but many, plunking into the clay or ricochetting off bits of harder limestone, went past us with a screeching noise—rather trying to youngsters who'd never been under fire before. Every now and then we saw some turbaned heads popping up from behind several rows of sangers (or rough stone breastworks) about two hundred yards away, halfway up the face of the cliff bend. The little shells kept them popping up and bobbing down and not our bullets, because, as you can imagine, most of my chaps were puffing and blowing like a lot of broken-down old cab-horses. They had scarcely been ashore for six months and were too much out of training to compete with the Gurkhas at this mountain-goat kind of job.

Some of them had lagged behind, and until I got hold of the Gurkhas' Adjutant, had a few words with him, and arranged with him which of the lines of sangars I should attack, everything was in rather an untidy muddle—my chaps and his chaps all mixed

up in little groups and clumps which had come together because of the broken nature of this side of the gorge. The Sub, who had taken his men farthest to the right, was high overhead with them scrambling from ledge to ledge, sliding down slopes, and crawling up others like cats.

While we got our people into something like order and waited impatiently for my puffing grampuses to join up, I had time to look across the gorge. Briggs and his men, mingled with Gurkhas, were pushing on more or less in confusion, their left flank high up on the cliff ledges; down by the stream the second mountain-battery had screwed their guns together and come into action; behind them the main body had halted, and in between I saw Hume and his fat sick-berth steward stooping down over one of our fellows.

I stuck my pipe in my mouth—absent-mindedly—and heard behind me: "Master want baccy!" I had forgotten all about Alexander, and this was no place for him, so I tore off a sheet of Bostock's signal-pad and wrote a hasty note to Hume to tell him to keep the chaukra with him.

"Doctor Sahib! Go quick!" I told him; and though he looked at me suspiciously he went down with it.

We pushed on, and in five minutes everyone was out of hand again. When I tell you that that steady old chap Peter Harrison was making a race of it with a lanky young subaltern of the Gurkhas, you may guess that the Sub and his men, doing the gazelle business from rock to rock above us, were quite out

of hand, trying to get the better of some Gurkhas still mixed up with them.

The gunners' shells prevented the fire from those sangars doing more than make the show interesting, but when we were not more than fifty yards from them, and bits of the bursting shells already began screaming back over our heads, they ceased fire—at the sangars immediately ahead of us, at any rate—and we could see the chaps, up there, firing over the top of them and not worrying about bobbing up and down. Bugles began sounding; I passed a little Gurkha bugler who had been knocked out with a bullet in his leg, sitting on an exposed ledge and blowing for all he was worth, much too excited to know what he was "sounding"; and then it became a bit of a scramble—our chaps trying to get at the sangars before the Gurkhas, and the Gurkhas not seeing why they should, yelling blue murder, waving their heavy kukris, and our chaps doing their best to add to the noise when they had any breath to spare.

We got right under the face of a sangar—helped each other up—Malony and a Gurkha gave me a shove—I whacked a chap over the head and lifted the little Gurkha up by his bandolier. He grinned his thanks, gave a jerky breath, and dropped dead with a bullet through him—a bullet which would probably have come my way if I had not bent down to give him a hand. Then there was a bit of a rough and tumble business, with Malony and Jenkins and Bostock backing me up and our chaps and Gurkhas all mixed up. My old weighted stick came in jolly handy, and the few Balooks who had stayed to welcome us

bolted away to another line of sangars farther on.

I'd almost forgotten that it was not my job to do the "bull in the china shop" business, so sent my two messengers to steady the rest of our chaps, who had already swarmed over that first line of breastworks —a medley of white and brown—and I got hold of the Adjutant, who was also steadying his men as best he could.

A lot of unpleasant firing broke out from that second line of sangars until the gunners, down below, turned their guns on to it and the Gurkhas brought up their Maxim and began peppering it.

Then it became fairly harmless, and the Adjutant and I had time to look about us and decide what to do next.

Another company of Gurkhas came up in support, the ripping little chaps showing their teeth and grinning eagerly.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Second Line of Sangars

Written by Lieutenant-Commander the Honourable James Crawford, R.N.

The Captain commanding the supporting company joined us. " Colonel's orders, sir," he panted. " You can advance when you're ready."

" Right-o!" I said. " My chaps are doing a few deep-breathing exercises; we'll be ready in a brace of shakes."

The three of us and old Peter squinted across the ragged ledges over which we had to advance to that next line of sangars, two hundred yards farther along the right side of the gorge. They slanted upwards very steeply to the top of the gorge.

The line of sangars we had just captured ran upwards to an almost precipitous cliff-like wall of limestone on our right. This wall came to an abrupt end about eighty yards beyond, and those whitish ledges and terraces seemed to broaden out as they disappeared behind that corner, and once we had passed it we might have our right flank exposed rather awkwardly. If any of the enemy did happen to be up there, the guns would not be able to help us, round the corner,

and I wished that I could look round it before advancing—but there was no time to do that.

"I'll extend to the right," I told the Adjutant.

"Navy's privilege?" he smiled, and as our chaps scrambled farther up the slope the supporting company occupied the gap we made.

"We'll get along as soon as you give the signal," the Adjutant shouted after me.

In a few minutes we were ready. I looked down, caught sight of another company of Gurkhas coming up to help us, saw the Adjutant looking up at me, and Peter, just below, looking up at me too. The Sub, much higher up, had his eyes glued on me, so I gave a whoop and off we all went, while the Gurkhas' Maxim spluttered pleasantly to back us up.

With Bostock and Jenkins following me, I kept pushing upwards towards the Sub's end of the line, because I wanted to look round that projecting corner of cliff as soon as I could.

As our chaps passed it I saw the Sub and, possibly, twenty men—the extreme right of our already ragged line—legging it like rock-goats towards those sangars in front of us, without taking the least precaution, not even taking the trouble to look over their shoulders, up the slope, to their right. I cleared the projecting corner, looked up anxiously, and as I did so a number of heads suddenly appeared above the sky-line; I heard a wild howl, and a whole crowd of chaps, led by a man in a brilliant red turban, poured over it and came charging down, letting off their rifles and waving knives.

The Sub was much too excited to notice them for

a few seconds, but then he looked up, stopped, and began shouting to his men to stop and come back. Perhaps ten heard and obeyed, facing upwards; but the rest went careering madly towards the sangars. I managed to get hold of some men and came across O'Leary, who had already realized the danger and was scrambling up with a few more he had collected.

But before any of us could come to the rescue the Balooks—or whoever they were—were not ten yards from the Sub. I saw him and his men crowding together to take the shock, and then that mob simply swept over them, pushing them downhill towards us while they clubbed their rifles and fought like wild cats.

Bull in a china shop! It was more like twenty bulls in an ironmonger's shop!

We barged into those who had swept past the Sub's party and drove them back a little. We fought our way upwards until we reached the thick of the scrum, and laid about us like "good uns" among that crowd of hissing, struggling, hacking Balooks.

I could not see the Sub, but his men were still on their feet—some of them at any rate—fighting back to back. My old weighted stick did some first-class work, but then came across a skull too hard for it and broke off short. I seized a rifle, clubbed it at another chap, missed him, and before I could guard myself a chap slashed at my head. Someone at my side threw his arm up and caught the blow, but the force of it knocked me sideways. I swung that rifle again and the chap went down, and then a brute let off a pistol within a few feet of me, and though Jenkins leapt in

between us and cut him down with his cutlass I felt as though a hammer had hit my left thigh, and toppled over. Half-sitting, I dragged myself up on one hand and emptied my revolver with the other; found Malony standing over me swinging his cutlass and yelling; tried to reload my revolver; heard the fierce yells of the Gurkhas; and a whole line of them surged past us. Before I could get my revolver loaded again the pressure round us had disappeared, and the din and the shrieking, the clashing of knives and kukris rolled away uphill with triumphant yells as the Gurkhas forced the Balooks back until they turned tail, bolted up the slope, and disappeared over the sky-line. I tried to get on my feet, but O'Leary, covered with blood, lay across one leg and the other wouldn't work; the Sub was being dragged from under a pile of bodies and seemed dead; two others of his men were evidently dead; and the little groups of the chaps whom O'Leary and I had brought along with us were trying to stick their first-aid dressings on each other, among them Bostock trying to twist a bandage round Jenkins's shoulder, both of them dripping with blood.

Across the slope came a burst of cheering, and I saw Peter's people and the line of Gurkhas swarm up to that line of sangars, climb over and into them, and Balooks running away.

Malony pulled O'Leary off my right leg and tried to get me on my feet, but the left one was twisted curiously under me and I could not move it; so I told him to straighten out the beastly leg and sat up, feeling darned useless—as useless as a sack of potatoes.

I sent Malony to tell old Peter to take over com-

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THE FLANK SURPRISED

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mand as I was a "wash out", and made Bostock signal to old Bull Neck.

I looked at O'Leary stretched at my side. His face and head were covered with blood from an enormous scalp wound, and his left arm had been almost cut clean through above the elbow. So it was he who had warded off that blow at my head.

He looked dead, but then I saw blood begin to spurt from his arm and gripped it hard above the wound, thankful that the poor chap still had some life left in him.

As I did so I heard, "Master Sahib want pipe?" and there was the confoundedly disobedient chaukra.

"Good for you, Alexander! It's just what I do want; stick it in my mouth."

He lighted it, and after I had my old friend puffing again I felt a bit clearer in the head.

"Is the Sub dead?" I asked one of the wounded chaps who, with Bostock, dragged him across to me.

"We can't shake no life into him," he said, as we looked at him. He still breathed—puffing out his cheeks; but as far as I could tell, although his shirt and shorts were covered with blood, he had no wound.

I looked across to the other side of the gorge where, high up on the upper ledges, Briggs and his men made a little patch of white among the Gurkhas' khaki uniform, clustering there and waiting for orders. Down by the stream both batteries were peppering the retreating Balooks, while the remainder of the Gurkha battalion halted behind them.

Malony came back.

"Told Mr. Harrison, sir; 'e sends 'is compliments

and is sorry to 'ear you've been and broken your leg. They've cleared out those chaps back to another little lot of breastworks farther on round the bend."

I made him lash his revolver lanyard round O'Leary's arm to give my hand a spell "off", and then the Gurkhas, who had come to our rescue, trotted down the slope above us, chattering triumphantly.

"Sorry you've been knocked over, sir," their Captain called out as he took them away to the newly captured sangars. "That little lot up there won't trouble us any more."

Old Bull Neck came up, breathing hard. "Sorry you're bowled over; the doctors are coming along; there's another line of sangars round the bend of the gorge, but those chaps are on the run, and we'll have 'em out of it and beaten in another hour."

He went down again as Hume and his fat sick-berth steward scrambled up. Hume was rather a lantern-jawed kind of chap at ordinary times, who didn't look upon life as one huge jest; but he was as cheery as anything now. With him came the two Army doctors, and they commenced fixing us all up as best they could.

So long as I didn't move it my leg didn't bleed, so they left me to smoke my pipe while they looked after the others. O'Leary's left arm only hung by a bit of skin, and they took it off above the elbow and bound him up. His other wound was a terrific slash down the side of his head which had laid bare the skull; he was quite unconscious. The Army doctor who dressed him happened to be the one who, two nights before, had thought he recognized him. As he dressed him

and wiped the blood off his face he *did* recognize him.

" I know who he is; I know where I've seen him before. He was a sergeant-major in the 2nd Rutlands when I was attached to them in India. I remember all about him. There was trouble with his company's funds—canteen or sports funds—something went wrong with them, and he got reduced to the ranks. Then he gave the Adjutant a darned good hiding—served him right too—he was the meanest skunk living—but this chap did prison and was kicked out for hammering him. Six months afterwards they found that the Adjutant had robbed the mess funds and done the same to the company funds—robbed them all of three or four hundred pounds. He was cashiered out of the Army; it made rather a nasty business at the time."

" Poor devil! We thought he'd been a soldier," I said. " He jolly well saved my life to-day with that arm you lopped off."

The bearers brought all the wounded, or they hobbled across, to where I sat with my back against a bit of a ledge; and before the doctors had finished with us the guns down below had moved forward to the bend in the gorge and the bugles began sounding the advance. The guns and the Maxims began firing, and through my glasses I watched Peter's little lot and the Gurkhas near him scurrying away until they disappeared round the bend.

" You gloating blood-suckers," I grinned to Hume, as he and the Army doctors played about with my old leg. " You're having the time of your lives; it isn't

quite so funny for me; you're spoiling my best pair of shorts with your beastly scissors. You wouldn't look so happy if it were your leg, or your shorts!"

The savage brutes only grinned back and wanted me to have a drop of brandy.

"Many more jobs?" I asked them, and was very glad to hear that only two or three men had been wounded down below and on the other side of the gorge. Those and a couple of men who had broken bones by falling down ledges—and our little lot—made up the butcher's bill so far.

When they had finished making me shipshape they went away to look after the Balooks, drawing their revolvers in case of trouble; then I noticed the brilliant red turban lying on the slope near its owner—the chap who had led that rush from the sky-line.

Suddenly everybody turned to look up the ravine. Bugles were sounding the "cease fire", and the noise of the guns and Maxims ceased—a solitary rifle shot and then absolute quietness. For half an hour we wondered what had happened, and then the *Apollos* came marching back round the bend of the ravine along the stream, Briggs and Peter at the head of them. They halted and piled arms a little distance to the rear, began filling their water-bottles and draining them. Harrison climbed up to have a look at us.

He had come through the shindy without a scratch, but blamed himself for our little trouble and was in a terrible state of worry about it.

"My dear old Peter, nothing to do with you," I told him. "I'm all right. What's happened?"

"White flags—message from Barkhat Khan—he's

coming along himself and the show's finished. I don't know any more," Harrison jerked out, and went up the slope to ask Hume if he could take us all down to the stream.

In half an hour a dozen of our chaps carted O'Leary, the Sub, two other men, and myself down to the stream on stretchers—oh, such a pleasant little jaunt!—and when we did get there my old leg began to wake up and take notice—ugh!

The Sub and O'Leary, alongside me, flapped their cheeks in and out as they breathed, but that was the only sign of life they showed—at any rate, they did not *feel* anything!

My head felt rather "woolly", and I thought a cup of strong tea would pull me together. "Try get master tea," I told Alexander as he moved my leg into a more cosy position. The little chap scampered downstream to find the lascars with our food, and when he came back, presently, with a canful and a mug, didn't I gulp it down! There's nothing like a little blood-letting to give one a thirst!

While Alexander refilled the mug a little group of chaps came towards us—old Bull Neck, my pal Eye Glass on his mule, and none other than Barkhat Khan himself with his father-in-law Mir Haji (the two kept far enough apart). They wanted me—me, of all people! Barkhat Khan wanted to shake my fist, and though I had the mug in one hand and my pipe in the other I managed to give him a friendly grip.

He turned to Eye Glass, and then I learned that that youngster of his had been taken ill again, and he wanted my pal Morgan.

" He thought he might be with us," Eye Glass explained, trying to keep his Army mule from treading on me, " and he won't bring the boy until he gets your word for his safety. Some of his chaps knew you by sight and told him you were here."

" I've promised to look after him," Bull Neck said. " It's really the best thing that could have happened."

" He's sworn to be good," Eye Glass broke in, " if the doctors can put his boy right."

" Safe as a house he'll be," I said to Barkhat. " We'll get him over to Muscat as quickly as we can, and you shall have him back as fit as a trivet," and when Eye Glass had translated that into good Persian—or whatever the lingo was—Barkhat held out his hand for another shake, bowed gravely, and went back up the gorge with Bull Neck. " He's sent messengers to stop the Basharkardi reinforcements he expected," Eye Glass called out as he swung his mule round and followed them.

Mir Haji stayed behind, clutching his dagger hilt as though half inclined to pay off old scores then and there, glaring after his son-in-law as he walked away.

To make a long yarn short, I didn't feel very bonny about this time, and what were probably minutes seemed like confoundedly long hours. At any rate, everybody tried to make me comfortable, and Hume stuck some stuff into me with a syringe.

I let him know that old Morgan thought that Barkhat's boy had a rotten appendix, and when he'd had another look at us cripples and whacked out more stuff with his syringe he went away, just as it was beginning to get dark.

Alexander found a couple of blankets for me to lie on, and I tried to go to sleep; but whether Hume had given me the wrong stuff or too much or too little of the right stuff I never felt so much awake in my life, and the chaukra had to go off and steal another box of matches to keep my pipe alight.

I know that all three doctors went off with Barkhat through the gorge to a small village beyond the other end of it; and about three o'clock in the morning, when the moonlight was almost as clear as day, Hume and one of the Army doctors came back with Barkhat and an escort of Gurkhas. Neither of them could interpret, so they hunted up Eye Glass, and as he had unscrewed his wooden leg when he lay down to sleep they carried him up to me to save time.

It turned out that they had hacked out the chap's appendix, and Barkhat wanted my word, once more, that he should be taken to Morgan and sent back as soon as he was fit. I had to promise it all over again and get another shake of the hand before he went away with the escort. That was the last I saw of Barkhat Khan.

The whole picnic should have started back next morning, but the doctors would not let the youngster be moved; so one of them, two companies of Gurkhas, and a section of mountain-battery guns had to be left behind to prevent his grandfather kidnapping him. However, everyone else packed off, and we wounded chaps had a beastly time. I almost wished that I had been like the Sub and O'Leary—blowing out my cheeks but feeling and knowing nothing.

We halted for the night at Sarzeh, and before we

moved off who should arrive but my fat old pal, the Derya Begi, with fifty of his bluejackets from the *Persepolis*. He had had her engines repaired at Lingah and had managed to get her down to Sirik, and though he was a little too late to share the fun of the picnic I was very glad to see him.

He had not walked or ridden (no camel or mule had been left in Sirik) but had been carried by eight of his crew in a palanquin kind of affair. He waddled over to me and burst out with: "Oh, Mr. Jimmy! Mr. Jimmy! what rotten luck. I'll cut his liver out; I'll cut it out, half a dozen times—I will."

"That's all right, sir," I told him (I wasn't feeling particularly fit). "He's promised to be a good boy for the rest of his life," and I let him know about the youngster.

"I'll cut his liver out of *him* too—if I live long enough," he muttered angrily; but I asked him if he had brought his brass gun with him, and he began waggling his finger at me roguishly.

"It's come along with me, Mr. Jimmy. It's come along with me."

"Got much ammunition with it?" I asked, laughing —it was the first time I'd managed a laugh since the day before.

"Just about as much as it had," and he winked at me.

For the rest of the journey to Sirik he made me use his palanquin. Hume said that for transport purposes my case was the worst of the lot, so the Derya Begi's eight men bundled me into it, stretcher and all, and carted me to the coast.

Before we started Hume told me that both the Sub and O'Leary were conscious, and he looked so pleased with himself that I had to ask why.

"Well, old chap, it isn't every day that one takes out an appendix, under a tree, by the light of a couple of lanterns, is it? I've had a message this morning that the chap seems to be O.K., and they'll probably be bringing him to Sirik in a day or two—and then across to Muscat."

He cheered me by telling me that I should be taken there too. Old Morgan would never forgive me if I didn't let him have a prod at my game leg.

On the way to Sirik the Derya Begi waddled alongside me—puffing and blowing—looking perfectly happy whenever he could keep his mind off Barkhat Khan. Alexander (with another dagger he had picked up stuck in his belt) strutted alongside him on one side of me, and Eye Glass, with his wooden leg slung across his mule, rode most of the way on the other side, while Malony clung to the palanquin to keep it from swinging.

At Sirik one of the *Apollo's* cutters, manned by the Gunner and every one of the English crew of the *Harold*, waited to pull Jenkins and myself on board the *Hardinge*, troopship.

"Haven't left *many* chaps on board the old tub?" I suggested meekly; but the Gunner was more surly than I had ever known him.

"Who d'you think we'd let take you off?" he snorted; "and they've sent some men from the *Apollo* to look after her while we're doing it—if it comes to that."

I wished my fat old friend good-bye; he plumped

himself down heavily on an upturned boat, loosened his tunic, and mopped his head; I saw the Wali sneaking up to him, salaaming humbly, and then I was pulled down the *khor* and out through the creek.

It was good to feel the sea under me.

As we passed the *Harold* at anchor I saw the lascars, in their smartest rig, standing to attention in the bows, and I gave them a wave.

"Have you packed up all my gear?" I asked the Gunner.

"Just a few things you may want—not all of them. You'll be coming back to us," he added fiercely.

I shook my head; I knew that I should not.

Sammy was waiting for me on board the *Hardinge*, and on the following day she carried my carcass over to Muscat, where old Morgan hoisted me out, trussed up like a blooming mummy, and stuck me in his little hospital along with the Sub, O'Leary, Jenkins, a couple of the *Apollos*, and a little Gurkha who died the next morning. His hospital was so small that we filled every ordinary bed in it and ran him off his legs for the first few days.

Ten days after we derelicts arrived there, he allowed the Sub to sit up in bed, for the first time, and smoke a cigarette. With his head clean shaven and with a pair of the finest black eyes you ever saw, he looked a desperate villain. He could remember taking that first line of sangars and remember scrambling over them, but nothing of what happened afterwards.

He, Jenkins, and the two other *Apollos* went back to their ship when she came in a fortnight later, the Sub quite and the others almost fit for duty. Barkhat's

son had been brought across by this time, and he and O'Leary lay alongside each other in a room next to mine. The youngster was already out of danger, but O'Leary, poor chap, had lost so much blood that he pulled up very slowly.

"He doesn't seem to make an effort to buck up," Morgan said one day. "It's this rotten climate. I'll get you both out of it as soon as I dare."

I told him the yarn I had heard from the Army doctor.

"Bring him in here," I suggested. "I'll see what I can do."

So that evening they carried his bed into my little whitewashed room, and I scarcely recognized the chap —he had gone down hill so much. He gave me the idea that he had turned his face to the wall and did not wish to get well.

When it was dark and Alexander (who had never left me, day or night, for ten minutes at a time) had brought a shaded lamp and stuck it on the table between us, and while those watchers from Jelali and Merani kept up their nasty noises—like cats on a roof —I told him what I knew.

When I had finished he lay still for some time with his one hand behind his head, staring at the little circle of light on the ceiling.

"That *is* my story, sir," he said slowly. "I knew the doctor directly I saw him at Sarzeh."

"Well, look here, O'Leary; if you like, I'll take the matter up when we get home. It clears you of the thing that matters most—the money part of it; doesn't it?"

" It do, sir," and he was in such a rotten weak state that he had to gulp out his words.

I left him alone, and presently he said: " It's very kind of you, sir; but I've changed my name since then, and I've no one left who knows me by my proper name or cares to. I'd sooner not stir up old mud, sir. I'll just stay on as I am, thank you very much, sir."

" Right-o! Did you give that beast of an Adjutant a real good hiding?"

" Didn't I just, sir! He daren't go on parade for a fortnight," and the recollection of it seemed to have made his voice stronger already.

That old hypocrite Morgan thought he began to improve from that night. He made him talk of old times on the Indian Frontier which they both knew so well; and the change in a few days really seemed marvellous.

Strangely enough, although Alexander knew he had saved my life, I had the greatest difficulty in making him lift a finger to help O'Leary; the little savage was desperately jealous of him.

I told Alexander that when we reached Bombay I would send him back to his mother at Baroda. " Then go and be a soldier, you little fire-eater."

" Chaukra go England; stay Master Sahib. When Master Sahib walk, chaukra go Baroda, be soldier," he answered defiantly, clenching his fists.

" All right! all right! Have it your own way," I said, " but don't bully me."

For the few days the *Apollo* lay in Muscat old Sammy used to hobble ashore and tell us all the news, his old red face bubbling and chuckling. Peter came

too. The night before the *Apollo* had to go away cruising, Sammy stayed as long as he could. I'd been telling him that Morgan feared that my left leg would never be quite an exact match for the other, and Sammy blurted out: " If it isn't, Jimmy, old chap, we'll go in for a three-legged race—the two of us—when we get home; you on your left and I on my right."

" If I'm no more a crock than you are," I said, " I don't mind a tupenny biscuit."

The *Harold* came back to Muscat when the *Apollo* left it, and as she lay at anchor I could just catch a glimpse of the top of her aerial mast through my window.

Every one of the *Harolds* came to have a yarn. Jenkins (back at duty) and Malony always together; and they would sit there, saying very little but glaring at each other until they went away.

A Lieutenant from the *Sphinx* had taken on my job —a man I did not know.

" I hope he treats you better than I did," I told the Gunner one evening, when he had brought along his cribbage-board.

" Umph! I don't know about that; there hasn't been a chance of any ' next time ' since; and there doesn't seem much chance of it, either," he snorted. " When that leg of yours is in working order again and you get another job, I'd like to go with you."

But that was the trouble; should I get another job?

I could never get Morgan to say definitely " yes " or " no ".

" I can't tell you, old Jimmy," he would jerk out. " As soon as I can get you to Bombay and home, off you go," and I had to leave it at that.

Barkhat's son had already begun to put on weight.

" He's as right as rain," Morgan said. " I'm going to ship him back to his father as soon as he can fix up a dhow to take him across. In two years he'll be a different chap, as big a scoundrel as Barkhat, or as fine a fighting man—whichever way you like to put it."

The Political Agent came in one night, very pleased with everything except himself. " I'm a bit buzzy in the head; I've taken rather too much quinine to-day, but you'll be glad to know that that show in the Marak gorge has finished the gun-running—for this season at any rate. Barkhat Khan has made peace with the Derya Begi and Mir Haji, his father-in-law, and there is practically nowhere where Ali Musa can land rifles. There won't be any rising on the North-West Frontier. It is a grand finish."

The day came when both O'Leary and myself were to be shipped on our way back to England, and the night before the " down " mail arrived to take us to Karachi I said to O'Leary: " Look here, O'Leary; I've got a nice little house tucked away down in Dorset. D'you know anything about gardening?"

" Not one thing, sir."

" Splendid! Well, you're going to be head-gardener; you're just the chap I want. If I don't go to sea again, we'll grow daisies and turnips and anything we darned well please; and if I do go to sea, you can jolly well grow anything else you like—while I'm away. What about it?"

" I'd like to, sir; like to, very much, but with only one arm I couldn't pull my weight, couldn't do much gardening."

" We'll let the little beggars grow as they like, then; so that's a bargain; that's settled."

" Thank you very much, sir."

Note.—The Royal Navy Promotion List on 30th June, 1912, in the list of Lieutenant-Commanders promoted to Commander's rank, included the names of Lieut.-Commander R. P. Dodington and Lieut.-Commander the Hon. James Crawford, D.S.O., and a few days later this latter officer was appointed in command of H.M.S. *Sphinx*.

So the Derya Begi and Barkhat Khan and his friends at Muscat—if they still were there—would soon see him again.